CHAPTER 2. DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE ON THE ORIGIN AND USE OF THE AFRICAN BURIAL GROUND

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This chapter presents an overview of the African Burial Ground from two complementary points of view. Part one examines documentary evidence about the origin of the cemetery and the development of its immediate surrounds. It covers the mid 1600s to 1795, and includes a chronology of property transactions, petitions, surveys, ordinances, and key events directly relevant to the cemetery's use. Maps of New Amsterdam/New York are reproduced in this chapter.

Part two takes a comparative tack. It examines documentary evidence about African funerals in New Amsterdam/New York, along with evidence about burial practices in the black Atlantic world when the African Burial Ground was in use.

2.A. Origin of the African Burial Ground

The African Burial Ground is the only cemetery for Africans known to have existed in Manhattan until the eve of the Revolutionary War, yet it left little impression in public and private documents of the day. Indeed, it is all but invisible before 1713, when the first known reference to African burials on public land appeared in a proposal written by the Anglican chaplain John Sharpe. Africans were first brought to New Amsterdam/New York in 1625. Where, between 1625 and 1713, did they bury their dead?

There are three places where members of colonial Manhattan's black community would have been laid to rest during the 17th century: in plots set aside on family or syndicate farms, in the town burial ground, or in congregational yards. Rural family cemeteries in upper Manhattan, New Jersey, and Long Island had burial plots for enslaved Africans in the 18th century, but 17th century examples of this practice are not known (Kruger 1985:545-551). Governor Peter Stuyvesant, who had the single largest slaveholding in New Amsterdam, may have permitted burials in the chapel yard at his *bouwerie*, the Dutch word for a plantation or a farm. Stuyvesant erected the chapel for his neighbors and tenants, and paid the Dutch minister Henricus Selyns 250 guilders a year to conduct Sunday evening services there (Christoph 1984:147-48). In use from approximately 1660-1687, the chapel was located near what is now the west side of 2nd Avenue at about 10th Street, within the yard of St. Mark's Church (Stokes 1915-28(4):202). The Dutch West India Company, New Amsterdam's commercial landlord, may have allowed burials near the camp for Africans who fed the lumber mill on the Sawkill (Saw River). Situated near present-day 74th Street, the camp was far from the public burial ground at the island's southern tip, where the town took shape around a fort built with African labor (Figures 2.1 and 2.2).

Figure 2.1.
Detail from the Manatus Map, a depiction of New Amsterdam in 1639, with a mark ("F") showing the camp (near present-day 74th Street) where the Dutch West India Company housed African workers. The unnamed mapmaker provided the earliest known cartographic reference to slavery in New York. Source: Stony Brook University Library Map Collection.

Figure 2.2.
The Castello Plan, cartographer Jacques Cortelyou's street grid of New Amsterdam in 1660, shows the common burial ground on the west side of the wagon road (Broadway), mid way between the fort and the wall (Wall Street). Source: Cohen and Augustyn (1997:38).

New Amsterdam/New York's public burial ground, in use from approximately 1649 to 1676, was located on the west side of present-day Broadway, near present-day Morris Street.[1] A second public cemetery was opened on the same side of the road, just north of the town wall (present-day Wall Street). It began operation after the cemetery established under the Dutch West India Company ceased to be used.

The second public cemetery, which is still in existence today (Figure 2.3), was integrated into the yard of Anglican Trinity Church. After opening its doors in 1697, Trinity Church banned the burial of Africans in the cemetery outside. The Vestrymen

> Ordered, That after the Expiration of four weeks from the dates hereof no Negroes be buried within the bounds & Limits of the Church Yard of Trinity Church, that is to say, in the rear of the present burying place & that no person or Negro whatsoever, do presume after the terme above Limited to break up any ground for the burying of his Negro, as they will answer it at their perill [Trinity Church Vestry Minutes, October 25, 1697].

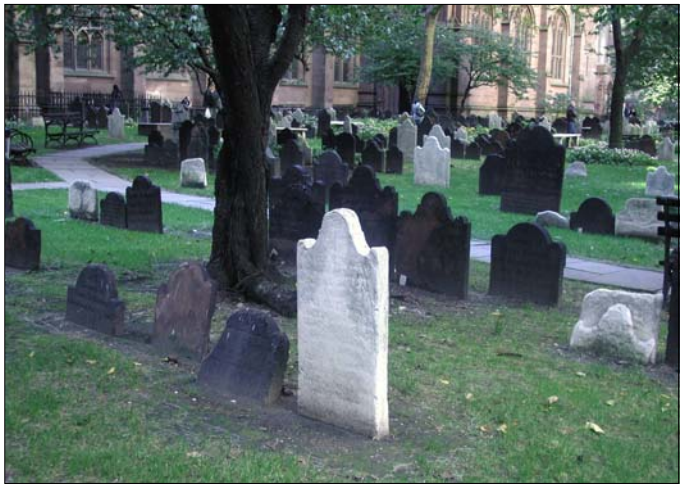

Figure 2.3
View of Trinity Churchyard, October 2005. Photograph by Rob Tucher.

The ban implies that Africans had been using the town cemetery during the 17th century. If so, Africans, or the men and women who held Africans in bondage, would have had to find another burial site after the cemetery came under Trinity's wing. Trinity Church did not take over the northern end of the town burial ground until April 1703. It is possible that burials of Africans in the north yard continued until then (Cannan 2004:3).[2]

Did the Reformed Dutch Church and other congregations open their graveyards for the burial of Africans prior to, or after, Trinity Church issued its ban? The officially sponsored Dutch Church had a wide reach in New Amsterdam's multiethnic, multi-religious community. Town residents, including Africans, were married and baptized by its clergymen, and attendance at its services was open to people of non-Dutch descent (on African marriages and baptisms, see Goodfriend 1984, 2003 and Swan 1995; on the

[1] New York Colony, Patents Liber 2:20; New York County, Deeds Liber 12:85, 90 and 13:102.

[2] Trinity Church's archivist suggests that there may have been unrecorded burials of black Anglican communicants during the 18th century (Phyllis Barr, personal communication). Burial registers are not extant prior to 1777, and churchyard headstones, which are used to document burials at Trinity, may not have been provided to blacks.

ethnic make-up of Dutch Church members, see Goodfriend 1992:16). The Dutch Church oversaw the upkeep and use of the town cemetery. It collected fees for the rental of the pall, straps, benches, and boards, and for tolling the bell for the dead. At the behest of the church, city officials reminded the town's two gravediggers to keep a register of "all who die and are buried" (Minutes of the Burgomasters, February 25, 1661, in Fernow 1907:77-78), but these registers, and any precursors, apparently are not extant. The proportion of the African population interred in the town cemeteries during the 17th century is therefore unknown. A new Dutch Church with an adjoining yard was opened in 1694 on Garden Street. If the Dutch Church on Garden Street permitted burials of Africans after the Trinity ban, the practice did not persist through the following century. An examination of Dutch Church burial records, extant for 1727 through 1804, turned up only five burials of Africans, and only one, Susannah Rosedale's in 1729, was *opt de kirkhoff*, "in the churchyard" (Reformed Dutch Church 1727-1804).

Other congregations held religious services during the Dutch period, but they utilized private homes or the church in the fort until establishing sites of their own (Rothschild 1990:44). In 1688, the town's Huguenot community erected a building for the French Church (Église du Saint Esprit). From 1688 until 1804, the French Church performed marriages, baptisms, and funerals, but no burial records of Africans are listed in its register (French Church of New York 1968). Among the smaller congregations, a group that includes the Lutherans, who erected a church in the early 1670s, the Quakers, whose first meeting was recorded in 1681, and the Jews, who had a cemetery by 1683 and a synagogue by 1695 (Goodfriend 1992:84), few burials of blacks were recorded.[3]

Burials of unfree Africans in congregational cemeteries would have been at the request of the slaveholder. A rough sense of the congregational affiliations of slaveholding households at the end of the 17th century can be had by linking data on slaveholding with tallies of congregational rolls. Working with figures from the 1703 census, when the black population numbered 799, historian Joyce Goodfriend (1992:76) found that Manhattan's Dutch households held 45% of the town's unfree Africans, the English held 40%, the French held 13%, and the Jews held 2%.[4] Based on a sample of 61 slaveholding households for which the actual church affiliation of the household head can be determined, Anglican parishioners were well represented in the town's slaveholding ranks. Anglicans held slightly more than half (81 out of 156) of the Africans in the sample (Table 2.1). Even if other denominations did allow burials of Africans, it is likely that the closing of Trinity's churchyard to blacks would have had a noticeable impact.

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[3] There were only two burials of Africans recorded at Trinity Lutheran Church in the 18th century: a free African woman named Mareitje van Guinea, in March 1745, and an illegitimate mulatto child, Abraham Beeling, in October 1747 (Stryker-Rodda 1974:84-85). Moravians buried just two Africans in their cemetery in the 1770s (Moravian Church 1752-1890). German-language records of Christ Lutheran Church include burials from 1752-63 and 1767-73, but these have not been translated. The United Lutheran Church burial records from 1784-1804 were not examined for the present study. For information on Protestant church records, see Macy 1994, 1995, and 1996.

[4] Official counts of New York's black population are presented in 2.D.

Table 2.1.
Church affiliation of a sample of New York City slaveholding households, 1703

Church affiliation	Number of households	Black Males	Black Females	Black Male Children	Black Female Children	Total Blacks
Huguenot	11	6	19	4	2	31
Reformed Dutch	17	20	15	6	3	44
Anglican	33	27	32	15	7	81
Total	61	53	66	25	12	156

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909) and Rothschild (1990:185-204). To obtain church affiliation, households with blacks in residence, identified in the 1703 census, were matched with names of church members from Rothschild's list.

There is no record of the establishment of a cemetery for Africans after the 1697 ban was issued, or after the northern end of the town cemetery was transferred to Trinity's jurisdiction in 1703. It is likely a cemetery already existed, the one now known as the African Burial Ground.

The African Burial Ground was located in a low-lying area on the undeveloped reaches of the town.[5] The spine of high ground that present-day Broadway would follow lay to the west. The *vlacht* or "flat" of the town Common, where indigents and criminals would be housed after 1736, was on the south. The lower end of Kalch (also "Collect" or "Fresh Water") Pond lay to the east/northeast.

The area was situated between the town and the outlying parcels the Dutch West India Company conveyed during the 1640s to Africans granted conditional freedom.[6] The parcels formed a loose arc around the top of Kalch Pond and the Cripplebush (thicketed, swampy wetlands) that accompanied the pond's western outlet across Manhattan to the North River, one of the names by which today's Hudson River was known. Domingo Antony's twelve-acre parcel, granted July 13, 1643, anchored the eastern leg of the arc to the wagon path that would become the Bowery Road. His land, located below present-day Canal Street, extended west to the "Fresh Water or swamp." The opposite leg of the arc rested on Simon Congo's farm, granted December 16, 1644. Congo's eight-acre parcel was centered on present-day Varick Street. One of seventeen African land grants located on the northwestern side of the Cripplebush, his farm angled downward from present-day West Houston to Charleton Street, between present-day Avenue of the

[5] The present-day state of knowledge about the geographical coordinates of the African Burial Ground during the 17th and 18th centuries is based, in part, on the documentary evidence presented in this chapter. Only a portion of the cemetery was excavated in 1991-92. The archaeologically excavated portion is discussed in Chapter 3.

[6] Eleven African men petitioned the New Netherland Council for release from servitude to the Dutch West India Company. The petition, granted February 25, 1644 (New Netherland Council Minute 184, translated in Scott and Stryker-Rodda 1974:212-13), made freedom of the men and their wives contingent upon the annual remittance of a tax and assistance, when requested, with public works projects and civil defense. The Company granted conditional freedom to some of its other African workers. Several slaveholding individuals manumitted Africans as well. On the legal rights and privileges of black New Yorkers under Dutch rule, see Higginbotham 1978:105-108; Goodfriend 1978; Moore 2005; Swan 1998.

Americas (Sixth Avenue) and Hudson Street. The approximate locations of the farms are shown in Figure 2.4 (for descriptions of the parcels and their subsequent conveyances, see Stokes 1915-28(6):73-76, 123-24).

Peter Stuyvesant relocated some of the African farmers in 1659-60, a period of heightened anxiety about the possibility of attack from Native Americans. In keeping with a policy to safeguard settlers on outlying parcels (see Stokes 1915-28(4):202-203), Stuyvesant recalled that he had "ordered and commanded" the Africans "to take down their isolated dwellings for their own improved security […and] to establish and erect the same along the common highway near the honorable general's [Stuyvesant's] farm." At least nine Africans were granted parcels "in true and free ownership" aside the common highway (Bowery Road) that edged Stuyvesant's land.[7]

The Dutch traveler Jasper Danckaerts referred to the African farms in a journal entry penned October 6, 1679. When describing the changing political geography of 17th century Manhattan, Danckaerts overestimated the liberty Africans had about where they could live:

> We went from the city, following the Broadway, over the *valley*, or the fresh water.[8] Upon both sides of this way were many habitations of negroes, mulattoes and whites. These negroes were formerly the proper slaves of the (West India) company, but, in consequence of the frequent changes and conquests of the country, they have obtained their freedom and settled themselves down where they have thought proper, and thus on this road, where they have ground enough to live on with their families [Danckaerts 1679-80 (1913:65)].

Europeans as well as Africans held land in and around the African Burial Ground. To understand how Africans used the land, our primary aim, requires knowing how the activities of other town residents encroached upon it. Two 17th-century land grants to Dutchmen, Jan Jansen Damen and Cornelis Van Borsum, are now known to have overlapped the cemetery. The Van Borsum patent encompassed the majority of the burial ground, and by the mid-18th century the parcel came to be known as the "Negroes Burial Ground." The cemetery eventually overlapped the south edge of the Damen grant as well. Van Borsum's land would become conflated not only with the African Burial Ground but also the town Common, both in the popular imagination and in the official record of property conveyances and deeds. Figure 2.4 highlights the geographical relationships between the African farms and the Damen and Van Borsum parcels.

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[7] Among this group were Christoffel Santome, Solomon Pieters, Francisco Cartagena, Assento, Willem Antonys, Groote Manuel, Manuel Sanders, Claes the Negro, and Pieter Tamboer. Stuyvesant's confirmation of the replacement lots, issued April 1665, was translated by Charles Gehring from the original held at the New York State Archives, Albany (typescript provided to the authors).

[8] The "Broadway" Danckaerts followed would likely have been today's Bowery Road. At the time of his journey, the road that became present-day Broadway had not been laid through the patchwork of African and European farms situated north of Fresh Water Pond and the wetlands to the west.

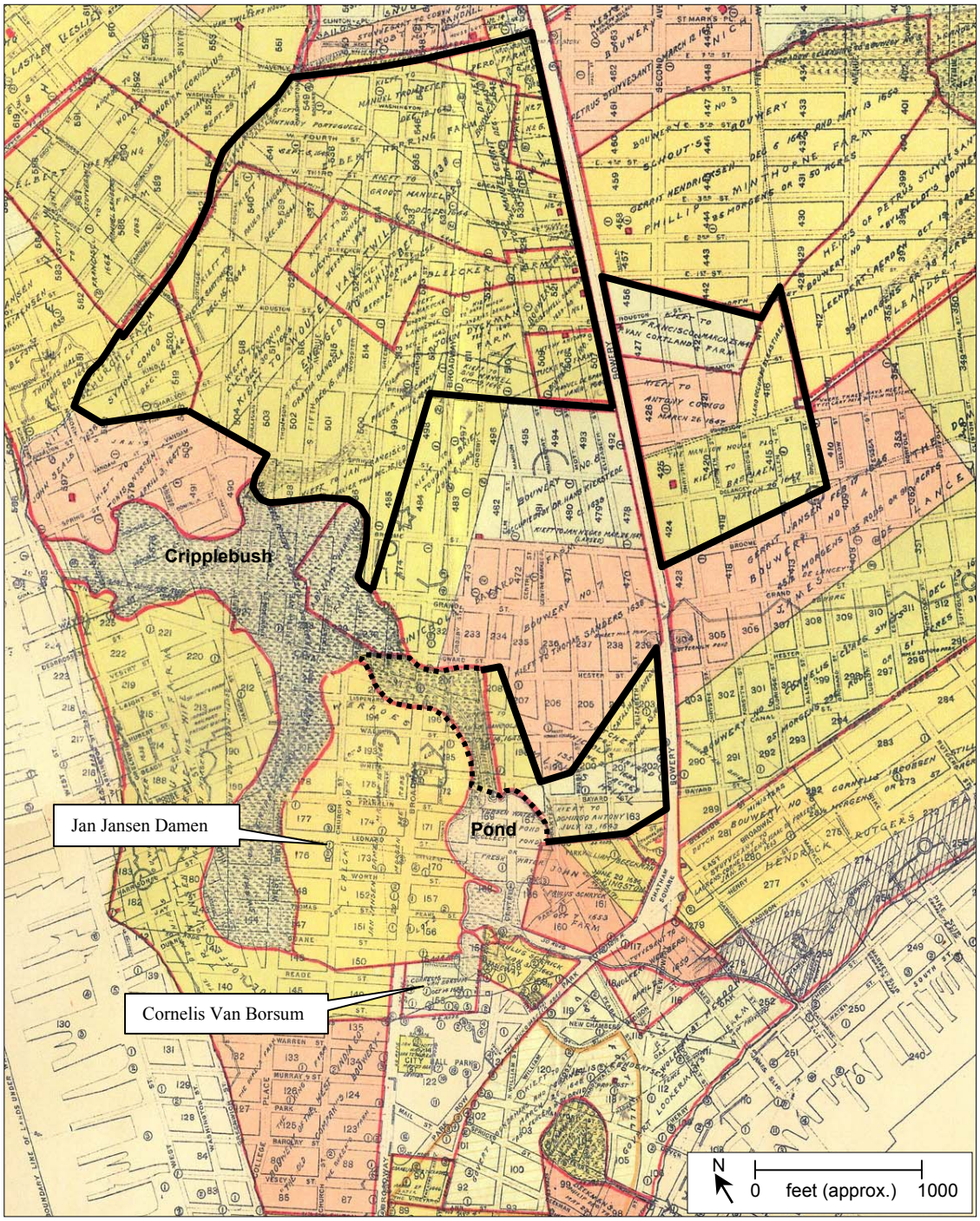

Figure 2.4.
Detail from a map of Dutch-era land grants, superimposed on a Manhattan street grid (circa 1835), showing the approximate locations of patents issued to African men and women (the areas inside the heavy black lines), Jan Jansen Damen, and Cornelis Van Borsum. The map, prepared by R. H. Dodd from translations of the original ground briefs, alludes to the features of the 17th century landscape—the pond, the swamps and wetlands, the wagon roads—to which these outlying parcels were oriented. The African farms formed a loose arc around the northern side of Fresh Water Pond and the Cripplebush to the west. The Damen and Van Borsum lots were situated south of the Cripplebush, and west of the pond. The African farms were subsequently re-conveyed to Europeans. Source: Stokes (1915-1928(6):Plates 84B-a and 84B-b). On the creation of the map, see Stokes (1915-28(2):355-57).

Jan Jansen Damen received a patent from the Dutch West India Company in March 1646. According to the ground brief, Damen had been in possession of the parcel for about ten years (Stokes 1915-28(6):82-3). Called the Kalck (Calk) Hook Farm (for the hilly spit of land that pushed into the western side of the pond), the parcel extended westward from the pond to the approximate alignment of present-day Church Street. It extended northward from present-day Block 154 just south of Duane Street to Canal Street.

Damen died circa 1651. Sometime before 1662 (Stokes 1915-28(6):82), the land was ordered to be partitioned into four quarters, and in 1671 Jan Vigne, the son-in-law of Damen's wife, came into possession of the southeastern piece (referred to as Calk Hook Lot #2; New York County, Deeds Liber 25:110). Vigne's piece overlapped the archaeologically excavated portion of the African Burial Ground (see Chapter 3). A nephew, Gerrit Roos, took control upon Vigne's death in 1689, and when Gerrit died in 1697, his son Peter became the executor of Vigne's property (New York County, Wills Liber 5-6:263 and Liber 7:465). Wolfort Webber purchased the property in 1708. By 1725, Anthony Rutgers had acquired, it along with Calk Hook Lots #1 and #3. The Rutgers heirs would continue in ownership through the 1790s, by which time burials were located along the southern portion of the property (for a history of the Rutgers family, see Crosby 1886). During the Rutgers' tenure, several buildings abutting the burial ground would be constructed, and Great George Street (later Broadway) would be extended northward along the cemetery's western edge.

Cornelis Van Borsum acquired his patent from Governor Colve in October 1673 (Figure 2.5). The grant was made in recognition of Van Borsum's wife, Sara *Roeloffse* or Roeloff (Roeloff was her father's given name), who had rendered service as an Indian interpreter. The parcel was described as

> a certain small parcel of land situate on the Island of Manhattan about north-west from the Windmill, beginning from the north end of the road which runs toward the Kalckhook, broad in front on the road or west side, 24 rods; in the rear on the east side, the like 24 rods; long on each side as well along the Kalckhook as on the south side, 44 rods each [Stokes 1915-28(6):123].

Based on the description, the parcel covered approximately 6.6 acres. Using as a guide the street grid shown in Figure 2.4, the area extended eastward from Broadway to approximately Centre Street. The northern boundary was just south of Duane Street. The southern boundary ran, roughly, along Chambers Street.

Sara Roeloff had seven living children, including grown sons and daughters, by her first husband, surgeon Hans Kiersted. She would have an eighth child with Van Borsum, and after his death in 1682 would remarry once again, to Elbert Stouthoff (for biographical information on Roeloff, see Totten 1925:210-212; Janowitz 2005). Roeloff had a pre-nuptial contract with her third husband that enabled her to retain ownership of her property (Narrett 1992:77-79). On her death in 1693, she left her estate to her children, and named as executors her son Lucas Kiersted and sons-in-law Johannis Kip and

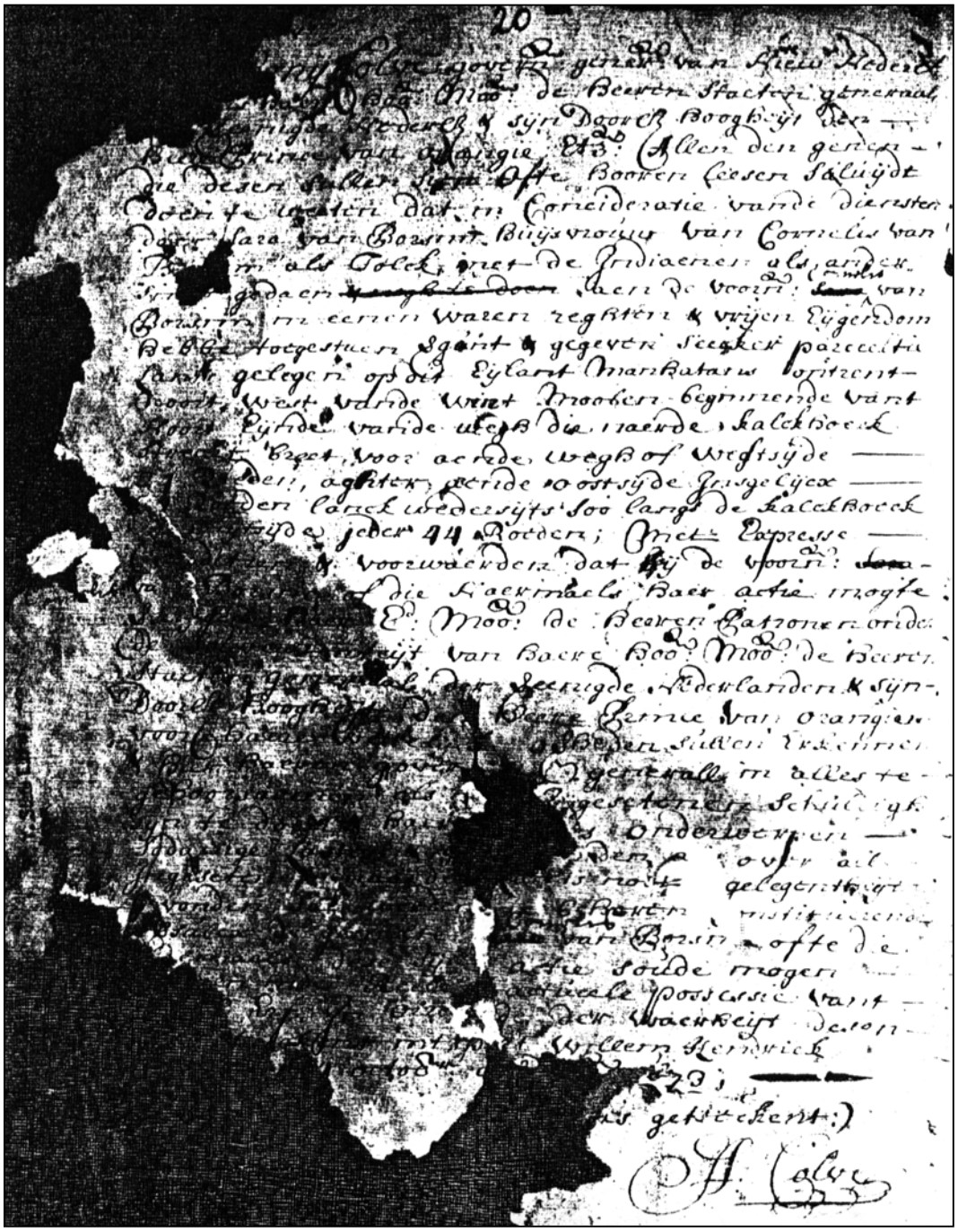

Figure 2.5.
The Van Borsum Patent, issued in October 1673 under Governor Colve's signature, describes the boundaries of an outlying parcel that came to be known as the African Burial Ground. The patent was damaged in a fire at the New York State Archive, Albany, in 1911. Source: New York State Archives, Colonial Manuscripts (Vol. 23, 20-433).

William Teller (New York County, Wills Liber 5-6:1-6). In 1696, Governor Fletcher would grant a confirmation deed for the land to these three as trustees of the estate (New York State, Patents Liber 7:11). Johannis Kip's eldest son Jacobus would petition the city in 1723 to have the land surveyed, but there is no clear evidence of any development of it around that time. A piece of the land near the southeast corner was leased for a stoneware pottery sometime around 1730. From 1745 to approximately 1760, a palisade cut across the bottom of the patent, eliding the southern portion with the town Common behind the wall. By 1765, five houses had been built along the east side of Broadway, within the patent, and were being occupied or leased out by the heirs.

Why and when members of colonial Manhattan's African community began interring their relatives and friends on the undeveloped edge of the town is not known. Our conjecture is that free and enslaved Africans might have begun appropriating Common land for use as a burial ground during the 1640s, when the first African farms were established, or perhaps during the 1660s, when some of the African lot holders were moved to the road alongside Stuyvesant's bowery. The first interments might have been limited to the core African farm families, but a more inclusive cemetery might have developed as members of the town's steadily expanding African population sought a burial place under the control of their own community. It is reasonable to assume that the families who were the farms' proprietors were influential in overseeing the burial ground. As African farms passed into European hands, and New Amsterdam was renamed New York, use of the burial ground would have continued.[9]

Although the area would be granted to Europeans by the third quarter of the 17th century, we hypothesize that its Dutch deed holders, and the English colonial government, would have abided African burials on land that was inconvenient for residential development and undesirable for agricultural use. Approval in practice, if not in law, of an existing African cemetery would have solved the problem the Trinity Church ban might have caused. It also would have been consistent with the racial segregation upon which slavery in Britain's mainland American colonies came to depend.

In summary, there is no known date for the origin of the African Burial Ground, and no evidence that explains how its location was chosen. We know that it was in existence by 1713, and believe that a need for it must have arisen by 1703 at the latest. We also know that the land that would become the African Burial Ground was in close proximity to some of the farms granted to Africans during the mid 1600s. Spatial proximity alone, however, cannot be taken as proof that the burial ground was established during the time Africans held these lots. Much of the land was granted to Sara Roeloff's husband in 1673, but neither the ground brief nor the 1696 deed of confirmation mentions the cemetery. None of Roeloff's heirs questioned the presence on their property of an African cemetery, though they knew of its existence—legal documents of the day

[9] Africans held the rights and interests in their farms for varied spans of time, as Stokes' (1915-1928(6):73-76, 123-24) biographies of the parcels attest. Domingo Antony's farm was conveyed in August 1668 to Augustine Hermans. The duration of Simon Congo's tenure is unclear.

identify the heirs as claimants and proprietors of the "Negroes Burying Ground." Despite the language of the law, the cemetery was a place where Africans held sway.

2.B. Documentary chronology of the African Burial Ground, 1650 - 1783

Since its archaeological excavation in 1991-92, the African Burial Ground's history has been recounted often, in all manner of media.[10] That history, however, has been reconstructed through a very limited set of public and private documents, and often inferences based on scant evidence have been made. To clarify the sources of information that anchor the archaeological analysis presented in this report, a two-part chronology of documented events, laws, and transactions that affected the use of the cemetery is provided.

Circa 1650. This is the hypothetical date for the origin of the African Burial Ground. Land grants to Africans began in the 1640s. The Damen patent, which skirted the northern edge of the burial ground, was issued in 1646.

1673. The Van Borsum Patent, which covered much of the area of the African Burial Ground, was issued under the signature of Governor Colve.

1697-1703. Anglican Trinity Church assumed management of the town cemetery and banned burials of Africans in it.

1704. French Huguenot Elias Neau, with financial support from the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, organized a school for enslaved Africans (Butler 1983:166-69). Enslaved and free black New Yorkers put literacy to a variety of uses, including petitioning the municipal government for assistance in protecting African graves, and acquiring land for a new cemetery (see entries for 1788 and 1795).

1712-13. In April of 1712, an armed insurrection of enslaved Africans resulted in six suicides and twenty-one executions (Governor Hunter to the Lords of Trade, June 23, 1712, in O'Callaghan and Fernow 1853-87(5):341-42; Scott 1961). The Common might have been used for the executions, and the dead might have been buried in the African Burial Ground. In the following March, John Sharpe of the Anglican Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts mentioned African burials in his "Proposals for Erecting a School, Library and Chapel at New York." He noted that Africans were "buried in the Common by those of their country and complexion without the office [of a Christian minister], on the contrary the Heathenish rites are performed at the grave by their countrymen" (1712/13 [1880:355]). He was almost certainly referring to funerals in the African Burial Ground, though the exact portion of the ground then in use cannot be

[10] The Office of Public Education and Interpretation for the project retains huge files of articles, books, and the many films and videos that have told the story of the cemetery and its rediscovery. Official documents such as the National Historic Landmark nomination (Appendix A), and the Designation Report for New York City's landmark historic district, provide synopses of the documentary research.

determined. The Common covered the area of present-day City Hall Park to Fresh Water Pond.

1722. The Common Council passed a law regulating the burial of "all Negroes and Indian Slaves that shall dye within this corporation [located] on the south side of the Fresh Water" (New York City Common Council, Minutes [hereafter MCC] 1675-1776(3):296).[11] The law stipulated that the enslaved had to be "buried by Day-light," on penalty of 10s., payable by the slaveholder.

1723. The Common Council appointed a committee to assist Alderman Jacobus Kip (the son of Johannis Kip and grandson of Sara Roeloff) in surveying the Van Borsum patent (MCC 1675-1776(3):335). Care was to be taken by the committee to preserve the width of Broadway as it was extended northward, through the patent. Kip's need for a survey may have been related to Anthony Rutgers's purchase of Lot #2 of Calk Hook Farm. That lot abutted the Van Borsum patent on the north, with the boundary running diagonally across present-day Block 154.[12] Perhaps there was some question about the exact location of the boundary between the two patents. It is more likely, however, that the extension of Broadway northward to Rutgers's land required an exact survey.

1730. Two plans of the town circa 1730, each based on a survey conducted by James Lyne, show little development in the area near the burial ground. The Lyne - Bradford Plan, published in 1731 (Figure 2.6), labeled the Common, the ropewalk along the west side of Broadway ("Great George Street"), and the powder magazine on a small rise between the main Fresh Water Pond and a smaller pond or swamp to its south (the "Little Collect"). Also depicted, but not labeled, were a building on the east side of Broadway, south of the burial ground, and a building on the northern part of the Common. The latter building was identified as a pottery on the Carwitham Plan printed in 1740 (Figure 2.7). The parcel of land containing the pottery was apparently in the possession of Abraham Van Vleck (Sara Roeloff's granddaughter Maria had married Van Vleck in 1710). Van Vleck probably leased it to William Crolius, listed in the city as a freeman potter in 1728. This area (on the south side of present-day Reade Street to the east of Elk, Block 153)

[11] Here and in other restrictive legislation, both "Negroes" and "Indians Slaves" are referred to. There is no reason to suppose that enslaved Native Americans would not have used the same burial ground as Africans, yet no distinctive forms of burial attributable to Native Americans were identified during the archaeological excavation in 1991-92. Although burial practices of Native Americans during the "contact period " are not well known, evidence indicates that Munsee-speaking Lenape Delaware buried their dead in immediate proximity to their settlements, and exhumed and re-buried the bones of their kin when settlements were moved (Cantwell and Wall 2001:97-103). Apparently the typical burial position for these groups, and for Iroquois, was flexed. By the time the African Burial Ground was in use, head-to-west burial with an extended supine position was practiced (Wray and Schoff 1953:57-59; Nelson 2000). The African Burial Ground Skeletal Biology Team compared the skeletal sample with Native American DNA, dental morphology, and craniometrics, but none of these statistical analyses pointed to Native American ancestry. If native individuals were buried in the excavated portion of the cemetery, there was insufficient evidence to identify them by their biological characteristics. The biological evidence generally pointed to African origins if any origin was estimable.

[12] Rutgers acquired one of the Calk Hook lots in 1723 and two more in 1725. The latter two were probably Lot #s 1 and 3 (Crosby 1886:84; Stokes 1915-28(6):82).

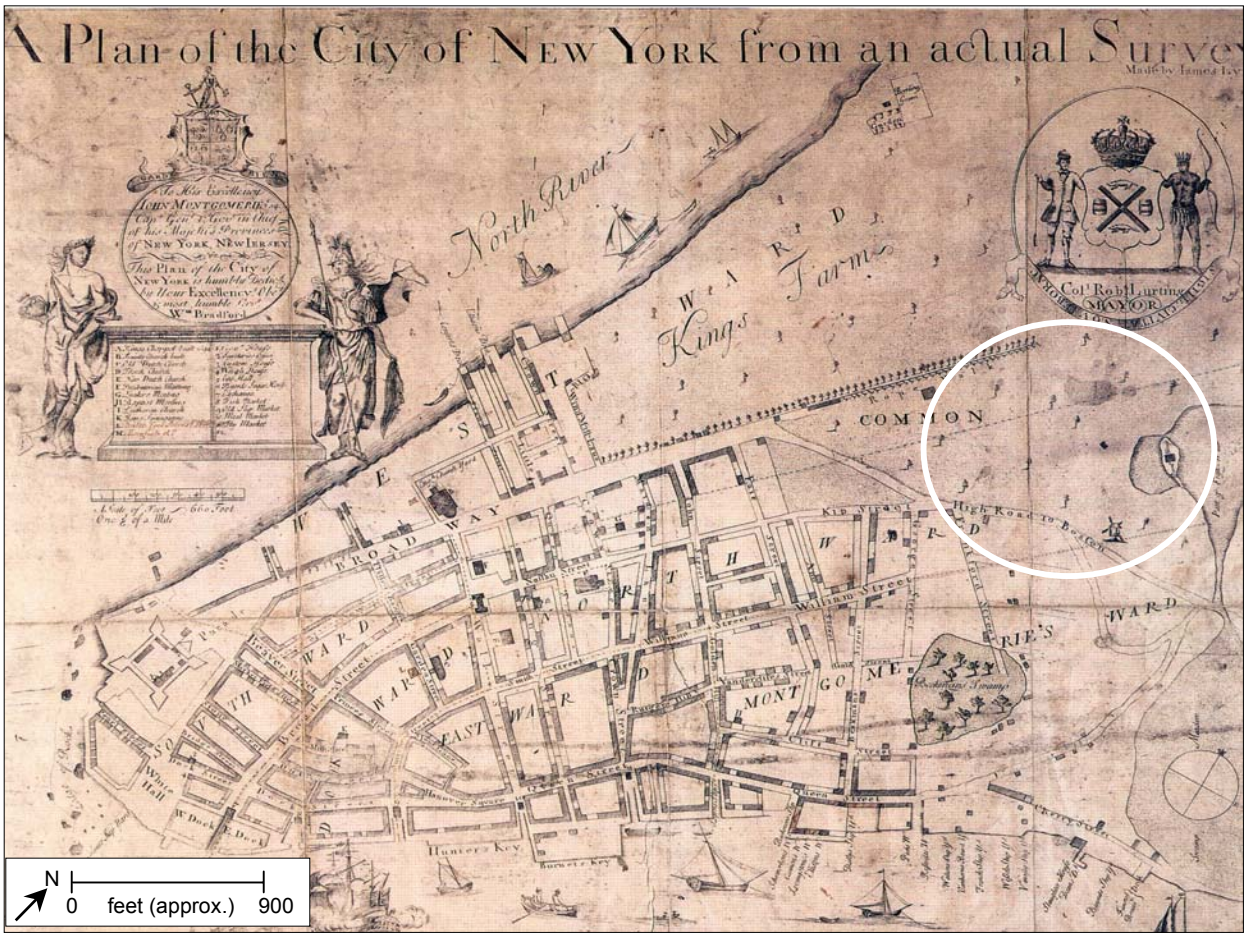

Figure 2.6.
The Lyne - Bradford Plan, printed by William Bradford in 1731 from a survey made by James Lyne, depicts New York in 1730. The African Burial Ground is not identified on the map, which Bradford marketed at 4s. 6d. The cemetery's immediate surrounds show little development. The structure encircled on the detail at the right was the Crolius Pottery. The large structure on the Common adjacent to the ropewalk has not been identified. The dashed line parallel to the ropewalk is a ward boundary. Source: Cohen and Augustyn (1997:54).

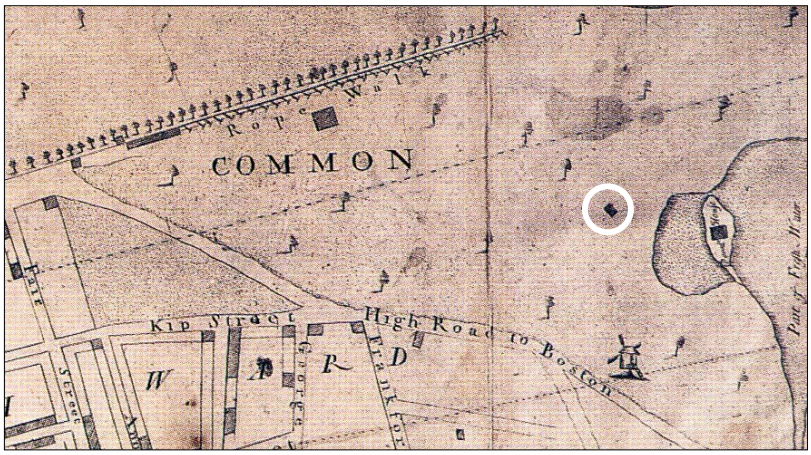

Figure 2.7.
The Carwitham Plan, named for its engraver John Carwitham, was based on James Lyne's survey. Printed in London in 1740, the Carwitham Plan provides more details than the Lyne - Bradford Plan. The arrow on the upper left points to the Crolius Pottery, located just south of the ponds, in what was probably the southeastern part of the African Burial Ground. Source: Cohen and Augustyn (1997:56).

was probably not used for burials after this date, if it had been previously.[13] The pottery may have begun disposing of kiln waste within the excavated portion of the African Burial Ground around this time (see Chapter 4). Only the pottery operation, and its waste disposal practices, would have constituted a clear encroachment.

1731. A smallpox epidemic in the city claimed the lives of approximately 50 African New Yorkers, and 79 Africans were listed in the bills of mortality published in the *New-York Gazette* in August through December. The *Gazette* sorted whites by congregational affiliation, and noted that eight of the town's congregations had cemeteries (*New-York Gazette*, November 15, 1731). Blacks were listed separately and, presumably, were interred in the African Burial Ground. In mid November when the municipal codes were renewed, the Common Council placed two more restrictions on burials of enslaved Africans (see entry for 1722). To ensure that African funerals were not a pretext for insurrection, the master of the deceased slave was made responsible for vetting the attendees and limiting their number to twelve, excluding the gravedigger and "the Bearers who Carry the Corps." Pawls and pawl bearers were also banned (MCC 1675-1776(4):88-89). A pawl, or pall, was a large, typically sumptuous cloth spread over the coffin (or the corpse) during the funeral procession. Pallbearers held up the hem. Given that palls were usually rented from churches, prohibiting palls at black funerals turned a sign of Christian burial into a prerogative of whites.

1732-35. The first cartographic reference to a "Negro Burying Place" appeared on a hand-drawn plan of the city, circa 1732-1735. Mrs. Buchnerd's Plan (Figure 2.8) situates the burial ground on the southwest side of the swamp below the Fresh Water pond. It is likely this is the same part of the Common referred to by John Sharpe when he mentioned burials conducted by Africans.

1736. The city erected an almshouse on the Common, at the approximate location of present-day City Hall. This was the beginning of the transformation of the Common into a site for public institutions (Hall 1910; Harris et al. 1993; Hunter Research 1994; Epperson 1999).

1741. A "great conspiracy" of Africans was thwarted and its perpetrators brought to trial (Lieutenant Governor Clarke to Duke of Newcastle, and to the Lords of Trade, June 20, 1741, in O'Callaghan and Fernow 1853-1887(6):195-98); Horsmanden 1744[1971]). Thirty of the convicted Africans were executed on the Common (thirteen by burning at the stake and seventeen by hanging), as were four of the Europeans. The executions were memorialized on the Grim Plan, a depiction of New York in 1742-44 set down in 1813 (Figure 2.9). The Africans might well have been interred at the African Burial Ground, if interment was allowed.

1745. The town erected a cedar-log palisade wall, and part of the Van Borsum patent (along the south side) was within it, part without. After this time, it is presumed that the

[13] The location of the kiln was traced back from later property records and maps.

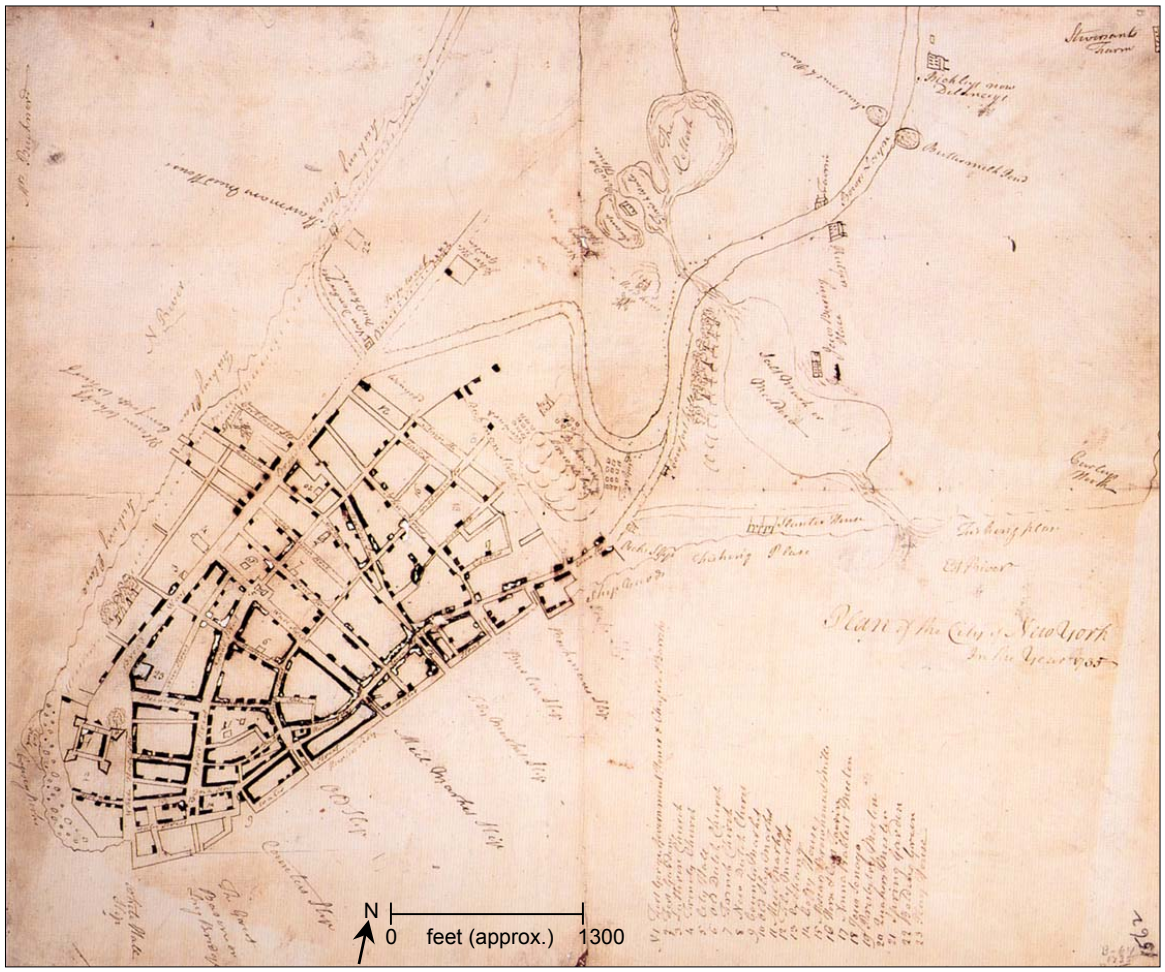

Figure 2.8.
Mrs. Buchnerd's hand-drawn Plan of the City of New York in the Year 1735. The words "Negro Burying Place" are legible on the central fold of the manuscript, adjacent to the "swamp" on the south side of the Collect (near the top of the full sheet shown above, and circled at right). This was the first time the cemetery was labeled on a map. Source: Cohen and Augustyn (1997:61).

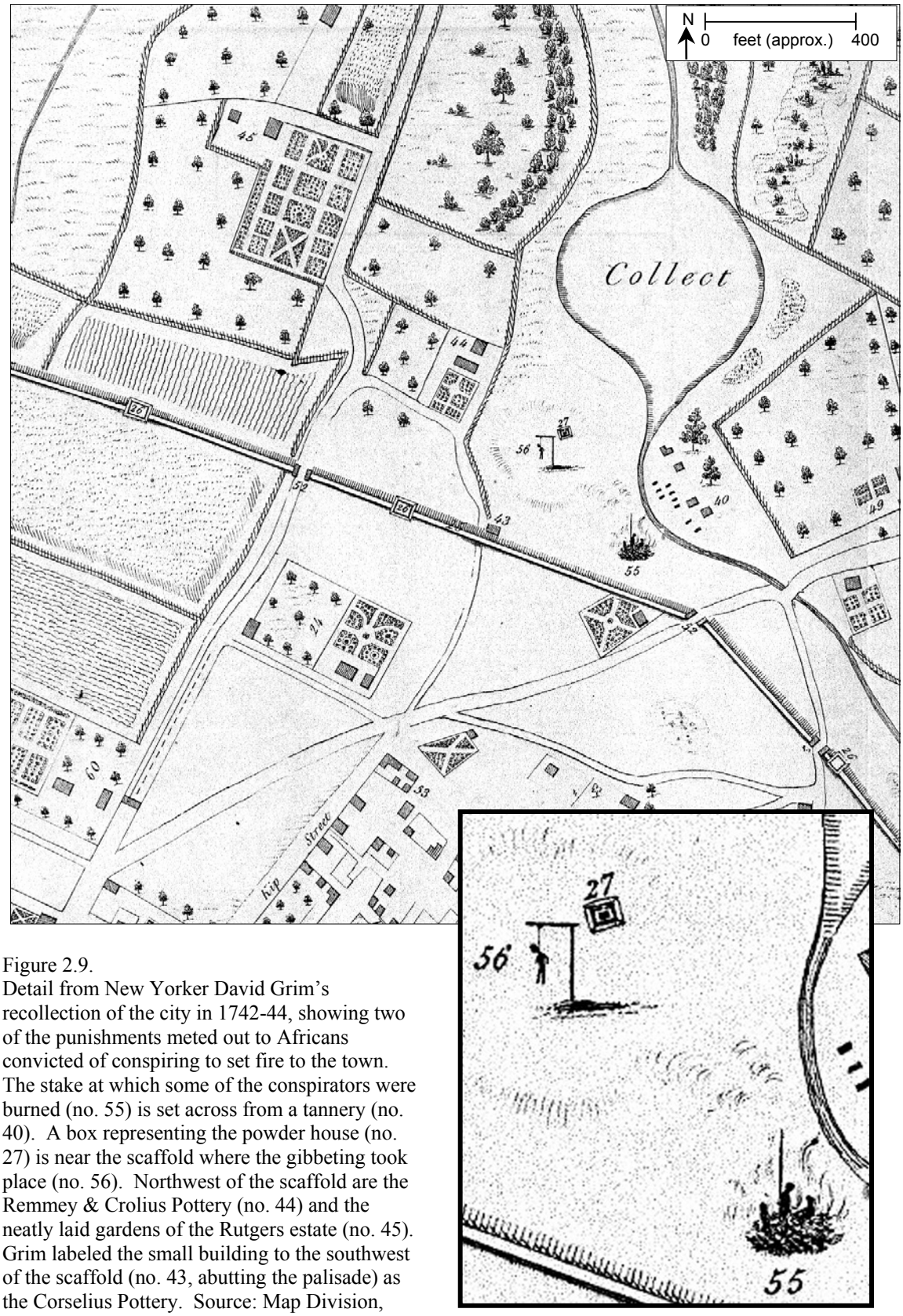

Figure 2.9.
Detail from New Yorker David Grim's recollection of the city in 1742-44, showing two of the punishments meted out to Africans convicted of conspiring to set fire to the town. The stake at which some of the conspirators were burned (no. 55) is set across from a tannery (no. 40). A box representing the powder house (no. 27) is near the scaffold where the gibbeting took place (no. 56). Northwest of the scaffold are the Remmey & Crolius Pottery (no. 44) and the neatly laid gardens of the Rutgers estate (no. 45). Grim labeled the small building to the southwest of the scaffold (no. 43, abutting the palisade) as the Corselius Pottery. Source: Map Division, New York Public Library.

African Burial Ground would have been restricted to the area outside (i.e., to the north of) the wall. When the palisade was dismantled is unclear, but city plans from circa 1760 onward do not show it. While the wall stood, access to the burial ground from the town would have entailed passing through one of the palisade gates.[14]

1753. In August, John Teller, Jacobus Stoutenburgh, and Maria Van Vleck petitioned the Common Council for "Some lands belonging to this Corporation in Exchange for the Negroe burying place, as also for a small Slip of Land on which a Pott house &c are built" (MCC 1675-1776(5):416). The land offered to the city was probably the portion of the patent that fell within the palisade wall, making it ripe for corporation encroachment or even confiscation.[15] If the wording of the request is taken to mean that part of the land Teller and company tried to swap had been used for burials, then the total area of the cemetery contracted following the wall's construction. The Council deferred consideration of the petition, and no further mention of it was made in the Minutes until 1760.

1754/5. The "Negros Burial Ground" was labeled clearly on the Maerschalk Plan surveyed in 1754 and published in 1755 (Figure 2.10). Also shown on the map are the town palisade wall, potteries at the presumed northeast and southeast corners of the burial ground, a structure on Broadway, and a dashed line running southwest to northeast from that structure toward the northern pottery. This line may represent a fence along the southern boundary of the Calk Hook Farm, possibly marking the northern limit of the burial ground (see Chapter 4). The structure on Broadway may have been a gatehouse to the Rutgers estate located to the north, or a house that Anthony Rutgers was leasing out.

1757. A small burial ground ("the length of two Boards") was laid out on the Common, on the eastside of the almshouse, for the abject poor who resided within (MCC 1675-1776(6):85). The almshouse cemetery was situated south of the southern boundary of the Van Borsum patent, but because the southern extent of the early African Burial Ground is not known, there is a *possible* overlap between the two cemeteries. Also in this year a jail was built east of the almshouse, and a barracks went up along the south side of present-day Chambers Street east of Broadway (Hunter Research 1994; Hall 1910). The construction in this area may have disturbed African Burial Ground graves.

1760. The Common Council and the children of Maria Van Vleck came to an agreement regarding "three Lotts of Ground Contiguous and adjoining to the Negroes Burying place on part of Which said Lotts, their Father [Abraham Van Vleck] Built a Potting House pot

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[14] David Grim, in notes jotted in November 1819 on the back of the plan he drew (Figure 2.9), identified the logs as cedar and put their length at fourteen feet. He situated one of the palisade's four gates at present-day Broadway near Chambers Street (Stokes 1915-28(4):591; Hall 1910: 389).

[15] We postulate that the portion of the patent on the south side of the palisade was in the *de facto* possession of the city, though not, as it would turn out, in its legal possession. The map evidence indicates that the first pottery works (circa 1730) stood *outside* the palisade's line-of-march. Another building, presumed to be part of the works, was located *inside* the wall on the city plan surveyed in 1754 (see Figure 2.10). It is possible that Van Vleck had the latter built for the Crolius pottery works in the 1740s or early 1750s.

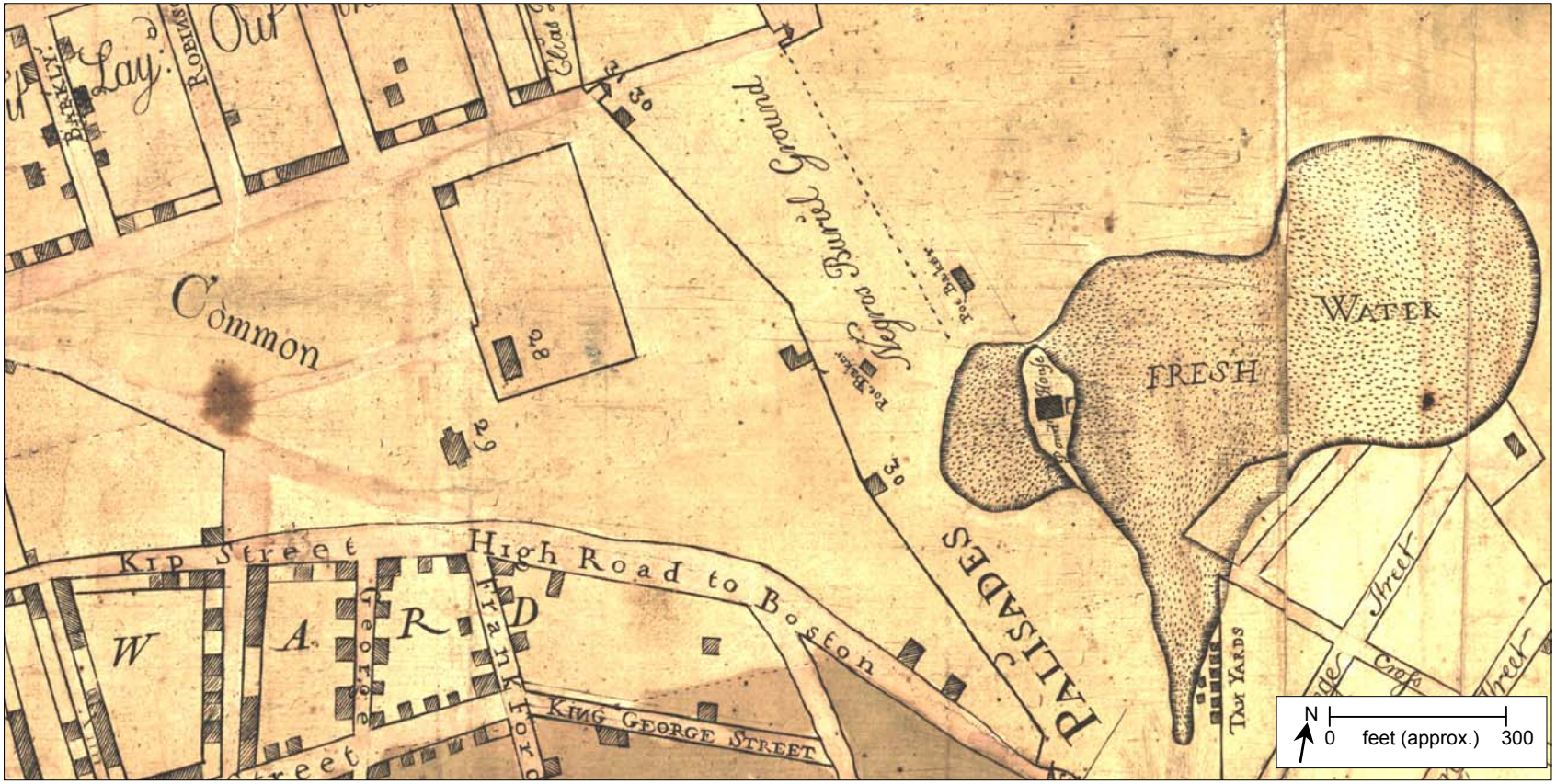

Figure 2.10.
Detail from the Maerschalk Plan, surveyed by Francis Maerschalk in 1754 and published by Gerardus Duyckink in 1755. The "Negros Burial Ground" is clearly labeled to the southwest of Fresh Water Pond and north of the Common and the palisade wall. The dashed diagonal line corresponds to the approximate northern boundary of the Van Borsum patent, and probably also of the African Burial Ground, and may represent a fence. The "Common" is today's City Hall Park, with Broadway running along its west side. By this date, houses had gone up along the west side of Broadway as far north as the Palisade. The almshouse (no. 28) and a powder house (no. 29) stood on the Common. The unidentified building that hugs the south side of the palisade is presumed to be a part of the pottery works on the opposite side of the fence. Source: Library of Congress.

oven and Sunk a Well Suppposing at that Time the said Lands were his property" (MCC 1675-1776(6):238). It is likely this parcel was separated from the majority of the Van Borsum patent by the palisade wall built in 1745, which may account for the city's unexplained possession, although there may be a missing transaction. Under the agreement, the city leased the land (a 100' x 100' plot) to Van Vleck's daughters for a period of nineteen years. Thus, land that originally may have been within the African Burial Ground was taken over for a pottery factory, came to be considered city property, and was re-conveyed by lease to the Van Borsum heirs.

Circa 1765. Isaac Teller (one of the claimants to the land) built three houses along Broadway within the Van Borsum patent, near present-day Chambers Street. At the time there apparently were two other houses on Broadway to the north of Teller's buildings.[16] All of the buildings may have encroached on the African Burial Ground. Although the burial ground's original western limit is not known, there is no reason to think it did not extend to Broadway. Teller built a fence around an unspecified portion of the African Burial Ground, and charged a fee for entering its gate (see Chapter 4). By the 1760s, it is likely no burials occurred within 100 feet of Broadway, the depth of a typical lot.

1767. The Ratzer Map of this year (Figure 2.11) did not identify the African Burial Ground. It depicted the houses along Broadway that would have occupied the burial ground's western edge, as well as a diagonal line that may have marked the northern boundary and may represent a fence. Three structures, all of unknown function but possibly associated with the potteries, stood along the north side of this line, two near Broadway and one near the swamp south of Fresh Water Pond. The barracks was located south of present-day Chambers Street. Numerous buildings occupied the eastern/southeastern perimeter of the African Burial Ground. The physical area available for interments was becoming increasingly constrained by this time.

1773. Trinity Church established its own small "Burial ground for the Negro's" on a lot bounded by present-day Church Street, Reade Street, and West Broadway (Trinity Church Vestry Minutes, September 15, 1773; Bancker, Plans, Box 3, Folder 81). Records of burials in this cemetery, located a block to the west of the African Burial Ground, are apparently not extant. The cemetery was in use through mid August 1795, after which Trinity's vestrymen arranged to have it surveyed into lots. Within two years the lots had been leased out (Cannan 2004:4).

1775. The Bridewell, an institution for the incarceration of debtors and vagagonds, was built west of the almshouse, near the present-day southeast corner of Chambers Street and Broadway. Again, this construction may have disturbed graves belonging to the early African Burial Ground.

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[16] According to testimony entered before the New York State Supreme Court of Judicature in 1812 (Smith v. Burtis) and 1813 (Smith v. Lorillard), Teller had one brick and two wood houses put up between 1760 and 1765. Two more houses were said to have fronted Broadway to the immediate north of Teller's buildings: the Ackerman house (next door to Teller), and the Kip house (next door to Ackerman, near present-day Broadway and Reade Street). For the case testimonies, see Johnson 1853-59(9):174-185; (10):338-357).

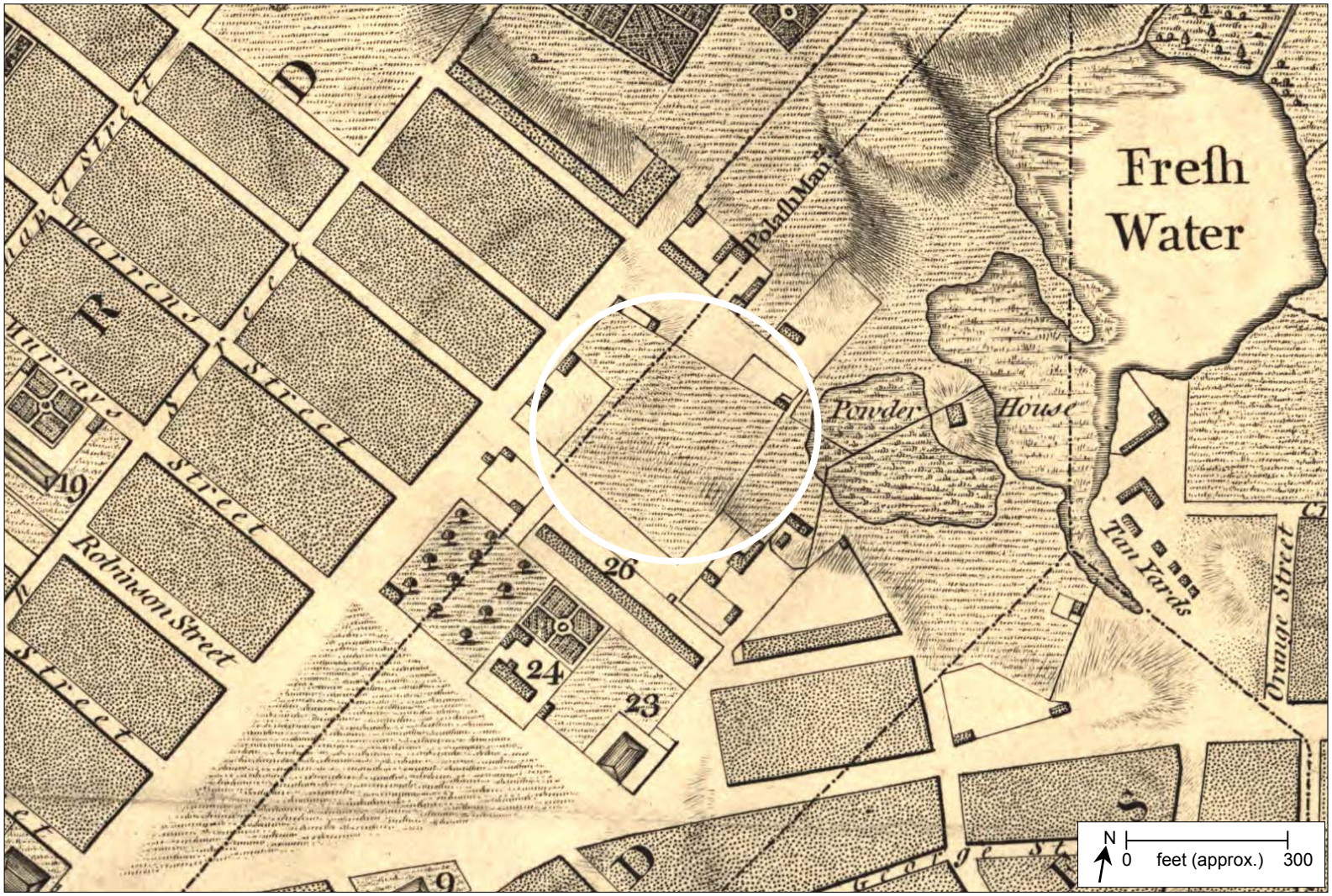

Figure 2.11.
Detail from the Ratzer Map, 1767, surveyed by Bernard Ratzer. The general location of the African Burial Ground is circled. The hachures indicating relief suggest the contours of the hillside sloping down from south to north through the area. Note structures on Broadway properties on the west side of the burial ground, the pottery buildings on the southeast, the barracks (no. 26) to the south, the almshouse and gaol (no. 24 and no. 23) below the barracks, and the diagonal line that may have marked the northern boundary of the Van Borsum patent. Source: Library of Congress.

1776-1783. British forces took New York and occupied the city for the duration of the war. They pulled down the houses Teller had built circa 1765, along with the fence (Johnson 1853-59(10):335). They also buried deserters and prisoners of war behind the barracks on the Common (British Headquarters Papers, Provost Weekly Returns 1782-1783; Stokes 1915-28(3):927). These burials probably were limited to the southern portion of the African Burial Ground (Figure 2.12), within present-day Chambers Street and between Chambers and Reade Streets. Some of them may have been shallow, with bodies "thrown into the ground in a heap" (Fitch 1776-1777 [1954:149]). No mass graves were found in the archaeologically excavated portion of the African Burial Ground. During the war, the city's population swelled with Africans in search of

Figure 2.12.
Detail from the British Headquarters Map, 1782, that depicts the area behind the barracks used for interments by the occupying British forces during the Revolution. This area (just inside the circle used to identify the general location of the African Burial Ground) is stippled with crosses, a convention the mapmaker used to represent congregational as well as common burial grounds. St. Paul's churchyard, in the lower left corner, is also stippled with crosses. Source: Map Division, New York Public Library.

freedom. It is assumed that those who died while in the city would have been buried in the African Burial Ground (see Chapter 9). When the British evacuated, thousands of blacks accompanied them.

2.C. Closing of the African Burial Ground, 1784 - 1795

The return of peace and the boom in development following the war spelled the demise of the African Burial Ground. Within a very short period, from the mid 1780s to the mid 1790s, the African Burial Ground would be ever more constricted, so that, finally, burials could no longer take place there. Free and enslaved African-Americans kept a close eye on the burial ground, and responded rapidly to its declining fortunes by mobilizing their own and the city's resources.

1784. In response to a petition from Henry Kip and the other Van Borsum patent holders, the Common Council appointed a committee in September to lay out and regulate streets through the parcel (MCC 1784-1831(1):81). Clearly, Sara Roeloff's heirs were making plans to develop their property. The committee dragged its heels, and Kip petitioned it again, in mid November 1787 (MCC 1784-1831(1):338).

1787. With the survey into lots of the Calk Hook Farm (Figure 2.13), parts of the northernmost area of the African Burial Ground may have ceased to be used. Houses were not built on these lots immediately, but it is possible a fence, or perhaps survey posts marking the outlines of the lots, discouraged burial in this area (see Chapters 3 and 4).

1788. Public exposure of the unsavory world of nocturnal grave robbing at cemeteries used by blacks and the poor created an uproar that spilled from the February pages of the popular press to the April city streets, where citizens mobbed doctors accused of desecrating the dead. Free and enslaved blacks had petitioned the Common Council in mid February to stop physicians from carrying African corpses to the dissecting table at the municipal hospital, located on the west side of present-day Broadway near Duane Street (Papers of the Common Council, Petitions, February 14, 1787/88).[17] Two days later, a free man of color detailed the horrid practice in a letter printed in the *Daily Advertiser*. Another letter disclosed that a private cemetery on Gold Street, made available for African interments by Mr. Scipio Gray, had been looted, too. Gray had been forced to remain inside his home while physicians ransacked the grave of a child in the nearby ground (*Daily Advertiser*, February 16 and 28, 1788). The cemetery may have belonged to Anglican St. George's Chapel, identified on a 1789 plan that depicts New York on the eve of the development boom (Figure 2.14).

[17] The men wrote on behalf of a burial ground "assigned for the Use of your Petitioners," a description that may best fit the Trinity Church African cemetery at the corner of Church and Reade Streets (see entry for 1773). Bodies were also disinterred from the African Burial Ground and the almshouse cemetery on the Common, as letters published in the *Daily Advertiser* during February, and recollections of the city's cadaver-seeking medical men, make clear (see Heaton 1943; Ladenheim 1950; Humphrey 1973).

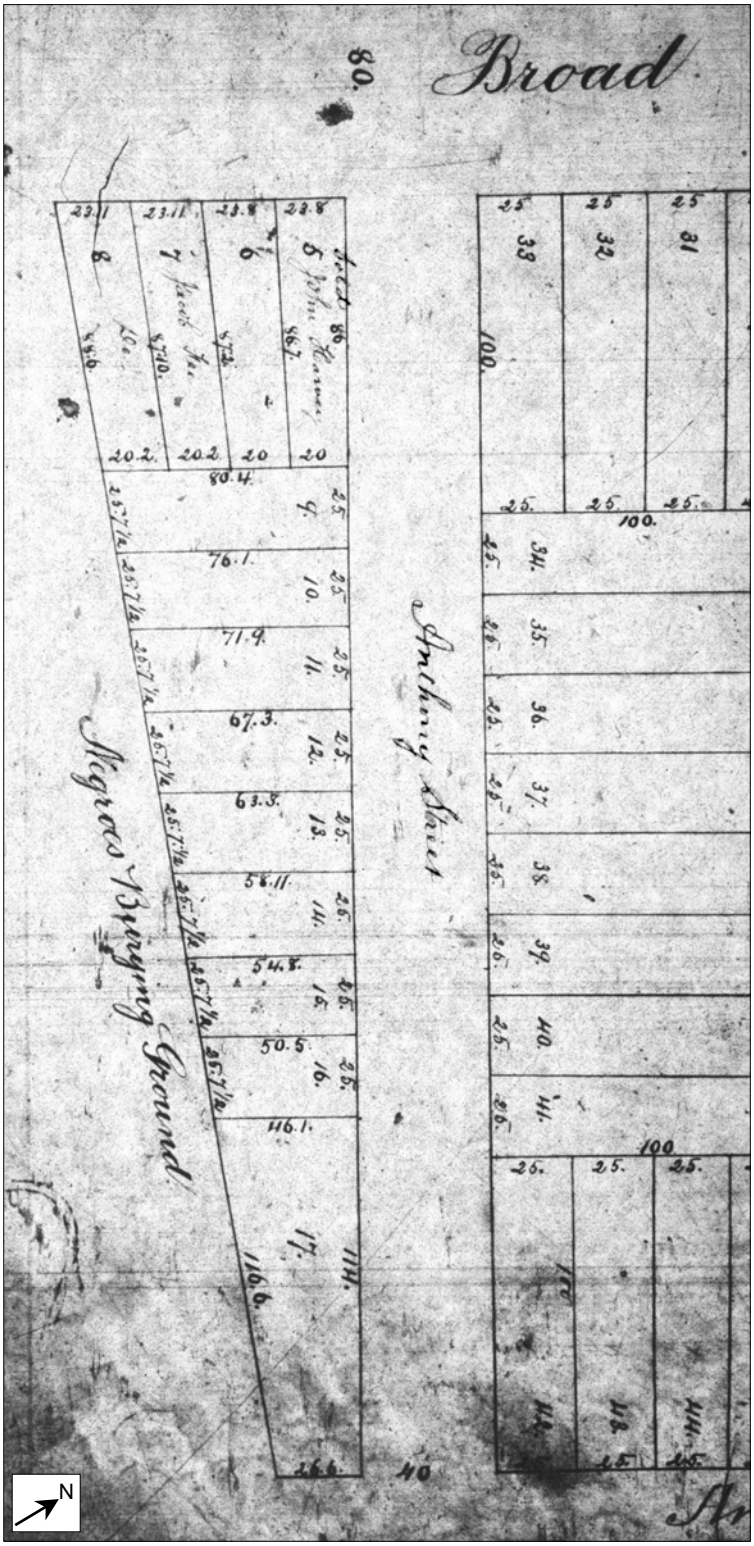

Figure 2.13.
Detail from a 1787 surveyor's map showing the partition of the Calk Hook Farm into lots. The lots on the southern side of Anthony Street (present-day Duane), shown abutting the "Negroes Burying Ground," actually overlapped the cemetery's northern edge. Broadway crosses at the top of the map detail. Ann (present-day Elk) Street crosses at the bottom. Lot dimensions are shown in feet. Source: New York County Register's Office, Deeds (Liber 46:139).

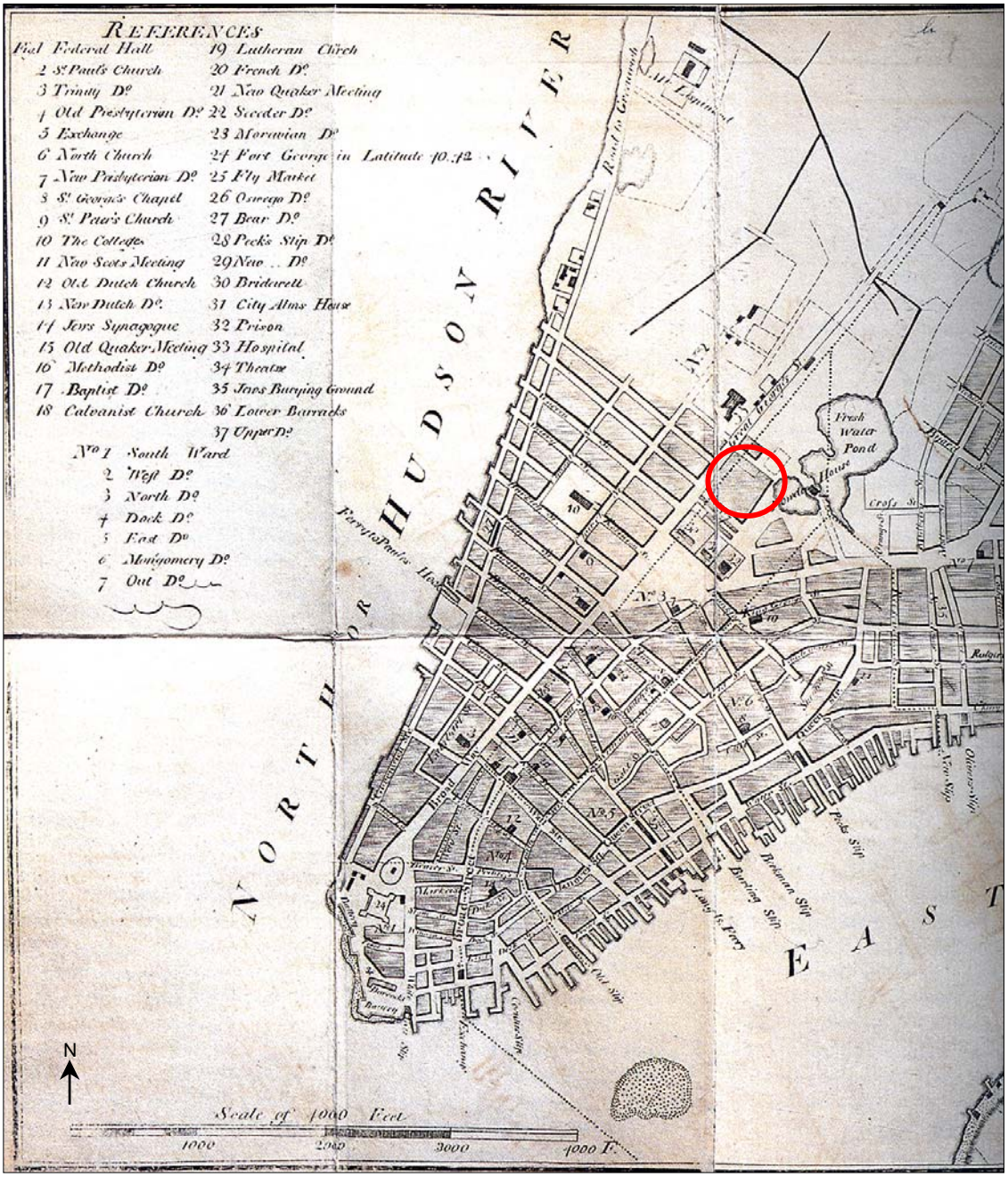

Figure 2.14
Detail from the Directory Plan of 1789, drawn by surveyor John McComb, Jr., for the annual directory of city residents published during New York's brief stint as the federal capital. The plan depicts the city on the eve of the development boom that led to the closing of the African Burial Ground (the cemetery's general location is circled). The Gold Street cemetery Mr. Scipio Gray made available for African burials was near Anglican St. George's Chapel (no. 8), located several blocks southeast of the African Burial Ground. Source: Cohen and Augustyn (1997:93).

1794. On October 27, the Common Council read "a Petition from sundry black men in this City praying the Aid of this Board in purchasing a Piece of Ground for the interment of their dead" (MCC 1784-1831(2):112).[18] The petition was referred to a committee, which reported back the following year.

1795. The survey and division into lots of the Van Borsum patent made inevitable the complete closing of the African Burial Ground (Figure 2.15). Property disputes amongst the heirs notwithstanding, lots were rapidly sold off and development would begin soon after the partition. Haggling between the heirs and the city over the transfer of rights and titles to the strip on which Chambers Street east of Broadway would be laid was resolved in June of the following year (MCC 1784-183(2):252-53).

Meanwhile, the Common Council committee charged with locating land for a new African cemetery reported on April 7 that a proper spot had been found on Chrystie Street in the Seventh Ward, on a parcel that had been part of the Delancey estate. The committee recommended that the city contribute £100 toward the purchase of the parcel, described as four contiguous lots, at 100' x 25' per lot, available for £450. The committee also recommended that the deed to the ground be held by the city in trust for its users (MCC 1784-1831(2):137). On June 22, the Common Council read into the Minutes a petition from Isaac Fortune and other free men of color who requested legal standing to manage the affairs of the Chrystie Street cemetery (Figure 2.16). Fortune and his fellow petitioners informed the Council that they had organized a mutual aid association called the African Society but had been unable, under state law, to incorporate as a religious organization. The petitioners described their involvement in arranging for the purchase of the Chrystie Street parcel from Samuel Delaplaine, declared their intention to make improvements on it, and asked for the right to collect the burial fees and exercise the privileges held by managers of other burial yards. The Common Council granted the request (MCC 1784-1831(2):158-59).[19]

It is not known how long African-American New Yorkers maintained their connection to the African Burial Ground. Once private houses and businesses began to be built, and landfill covered the ground surface, surely the community was severely constrained from even visiting graves. Yet during the opening decades of the 19th century, free blacks came to reside in the relatively inexpensive housing along the streets that had been laid through the cemetery and its immediate surrounds. The concentration of black households within the area was evident by 1810, as historian Shane White (1991:171-179) has shown (see Chapter 9). The neighborhood was also home to the early independent black churches, where many African-American New Yorkers invested their spiritual energies and organizational acumen after the African Burial Ground had closed.

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[18] The words of the petition were not read into the Minutes, and the petition itself is apparently not extant—a search of the Common Council Papers held at the Municipal Archives of the City of New York came up empty-handed. Though it is not possible to find out whether the petition carried any signatures, it is likely that some of its writers were the founding members of the African Society, which petitioned the Common Council eight months later regarding the management of the African cemetery at Chrystie Street.

[19] Two months later, the process of closing down the Trinity Church African cemetery got underway when the Vestrymen made plans to survey and divide the ground into lots (see entry for 1773).

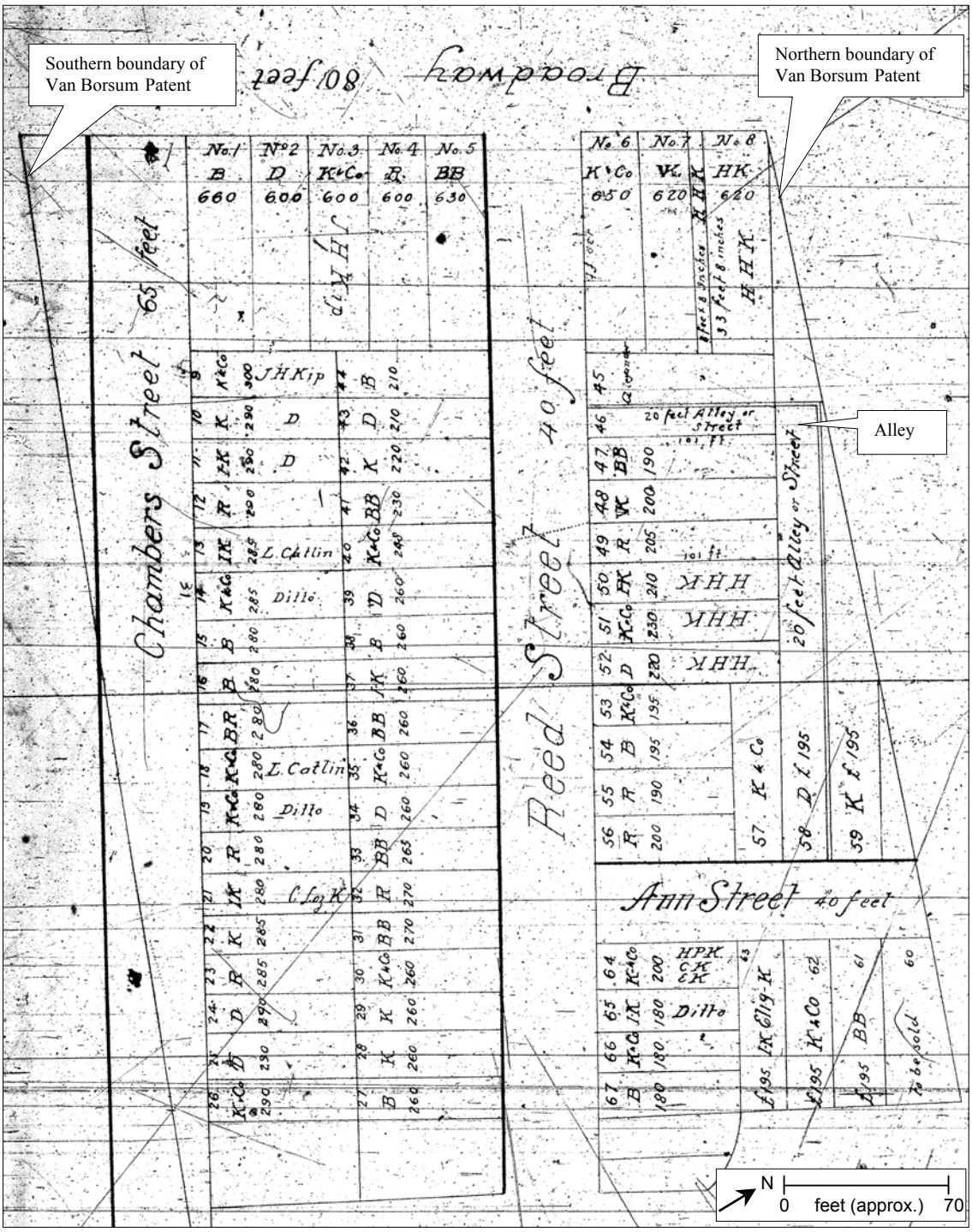
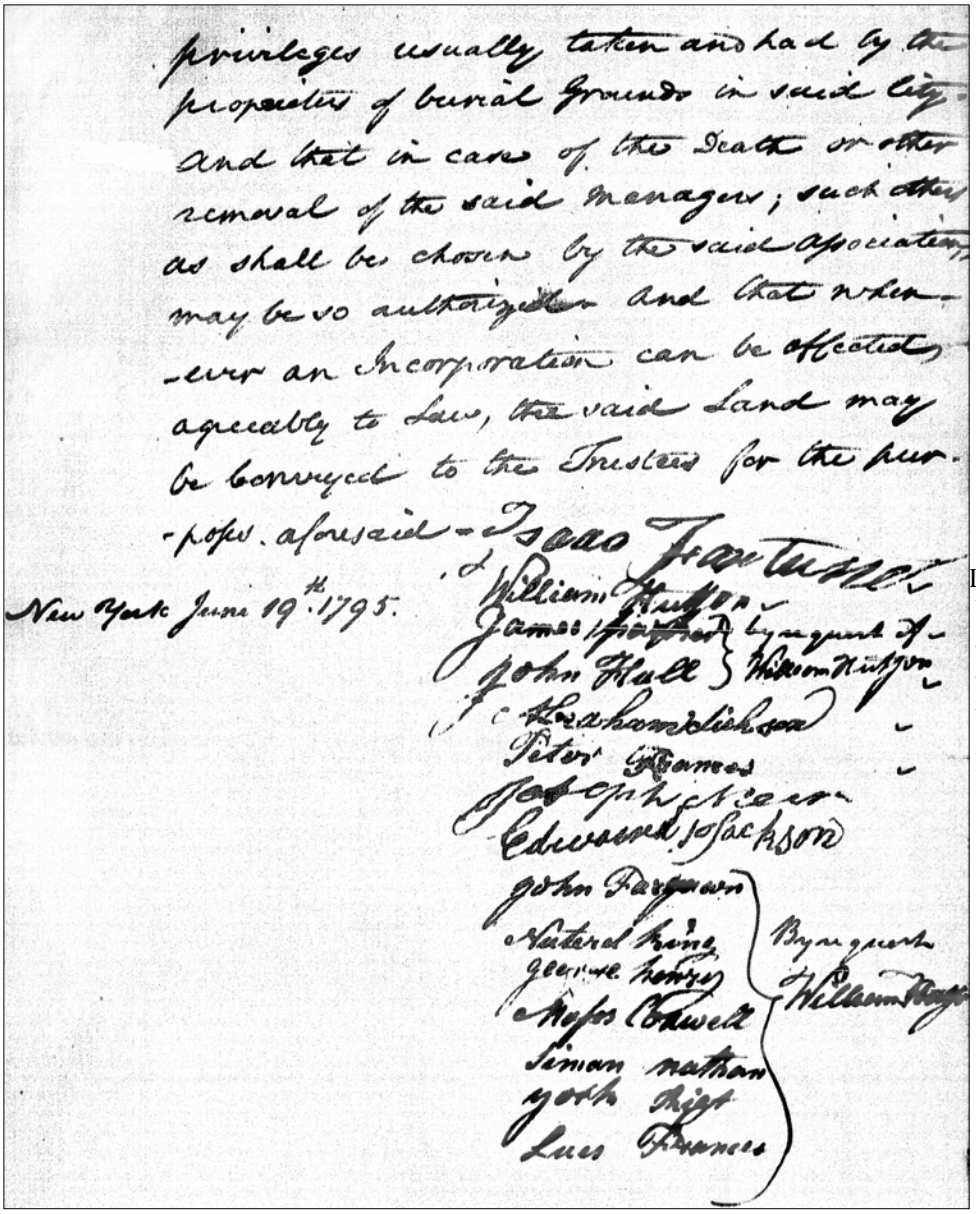


Figure 2.15.
Detail from a 1795 surveyor's map showing the locations of the lots assigned to Sara Roeloff's heirs. For example, *D* stood for lots that would have fallen to the Tellers (descended from Rachel Kiersted), *F* for those of the Van Vlecks (descended from Catherine Kiersted), *B* for Daniel Denniston (whose wife descended from Lucas Kiersted). The alley laid out from Reed Street to Ann (later Elm/Elk) Street would be shifted slightly and come to be called Republican Alley. Source: New York County Register's Office, Deeds (Liber 195:405, Filed Map 76J).



Isaac Fortune
William Hutson
James Parker
John Hall
Abraham Dickenson
Peter Frances

Figure 2.16.
Detail of a petition submitted in June 1795 to the municipal government from the African Society, requesting that six of its members be granted legal standing to manage a cemetery established on Chrystie Street for black New Yorkers. The names of the proposed managers are marked with a check. Source: Municipal Archives of the City of New York, Papers of the Common Council, Petitions (Isaac Fortune, June 19, 1795).

The land where the African Burial Ground sat would see several more phases of development over the next two hundred years. With the exception of property deeds and surveyor's plans, traces of the cemetery would become increasingly scarce. When the cemetery was unearthed in 1991-92, most New Yorkers were wholly surprised. The African Burial Ground's period of use, which might have lasted a century and a half, had to be examined anew, as did the lives and labors of the New Yorkers who reposed there.

Figure 2.17.
Detail from the Taylor - Roberts Plan, 1797, drawn by city surveyor Benjamin Taylor and engraved by John Roberts, showing the newly-laid street grid that crossed the African Burial Ground at the end of the 18th century. Source: Rothschild (1990:30).

2.D. African funeral practices in New Amsterdam/New York

The spatial relationship between the African Burial Ground and the city changed radically during the 18th century. As New York's population rose and its economy expanded, the built environment advanced northward, bringing private homes, factories, municipal institutions, and pleasure gardens to the cemetery's surrounds. The interplay between urban development and population growth would leave a mark in the archaeologically excavated portion of the African Burial Ground, particularly in regard to the distribution of graves. The concerns of those who looked to the cemetery as a place of repose for their relatives and friends would also leave a mark in the excavated burial ground.[20] But black New Yorkers' efforts to care for their dead did not enter the documentary record until late in the day, as seen in the chronology of events that affected the cemetery's use. And while documentation about the African Burial Ground is rather thin, it is considerably more substantial than the paper trail on funeral practices in 17th and 18th century black New York.

No eyewitness accounts of how Africans buried their dead in New Amsterdam/New York have come down to us. No domestic ledgers or personal diaries have come to light that tell us whether household heads customarily footed the funeral bills of the Africans who resided in Manhattan homes. A handful of records touch on burial logistics and labor, but these records date to the first half of the 18th century. Among them, as noted, are the Rev. Sharpe's remark of 1713 about Africans conducting "Heathenish" graveside rites, and city ordinances from 1722 and 1731 that restricted the hour and size of African funerals and banned the use of palls. Cabinetmaker Joshua Delaplaine's daybook rounds out the list. The daybook has entries for thirteen slaveholders who purchased coffins for African men, women, and children between 1753 and 1756 (see Chapter 10).

These writers were tight-fisted with narrative detail. John Sharpe, for example, omitted the sights and sounds of the graveside rites. He did not mention how long the rites lasted or note whether they varied in relation to a person's age, sex, or manner of death. Nor did he reflect on how the rites orchestrated the expression of private grief, strengthened or attenuated attachments between the living and the dead, or transformed the once-living person into constituent qualities, forces, or parts. Sharpe lived in a Manhattan made nervous by the anticipation of conspiracies and revolts. So, too, did the city officials who envisioned a world in which the funerals of unfree Africans would be small in size, short on pomp, and finished by sundown. Whether large processions, cloth-covered corpses, and nighttime burials had been the norm when the restrictions were enacted is unclear. Delaplaine's daybook provides a glimpse of the monetary side of mid 18th century funerals, but it does not reveal whether colonial Manhattan's slaveholders typically paid for coffins for the African dead.

Although the experience of death and the organization of interment cannot be teased from the documentary record, population histories assembled by the African Burial Ground

[20] Chapter 5 provides an overview of the mortuary program that entered the African Burial Ground's archaeological record. Chapters 6 through 9 track the interplay between the mortuary program, the built environment, and the African population through the 18th century.

History Team indicate that funeral practices in black New Amsterdam/New York were part of an Atlantic world of enormous complexity and scope. To help clarify the material signatures left by those who interred the individuals in the archaeologically excavated portion of the cemetery, we draw on two core aspects of the History Team's report. One aspect concerns documentary evidence on the origins of the city's African community. The other aspect concerns documentary evidence about the care of the dead in central and western Africa and the Caribbean, the primary regions that furnished the workers on whom white New Yorkers relied.

Population

Black New Yorkers formed a critical mass during the colonial era and in the decades immediately following the Revolutionary War. The numbers in Table 2.2 make it clear that this was a community sizeable enough to fill a cemetery. Blacks constituted over 14% of the city's population at the end of the 17th century, fully 20.9% in 1746, and a low of 7.9 % just after the Revolution.

Table 2.2. Black population of New York County, 1698 - 1800[21]

Year	Population
1698	700
1703	799
1712	975
1723	1,362
1731	1,577
1737	1,719
1746	2,444
1749	2,368
1756	2,278
1771	3,137
1786	2,107
1790	3,092
1800	5,867

"What proportion of the city's black population was enslaved during the 17th and 18th centuries and what proportion was free?" is a question that has been asked often. Free blacks were not counted separately from the enslaved until the first Federal census of 1790. White (1991:153) suggests that there were probably "never more than 100 free blacks in New York City during the colonial period." Historian Christopher Moore (personal communication) has suggested that following the restrictive British colonial legislation of the early 18th century most if not all of those in families that had been free or "semi-free" under the Dutch simply left New York. The count for 1790, which reflects post-Revolutionary War demographic changes, includes 1,036 free and 2,056 enslaved blacks. The count for 1800 includes 3,333 free and 2,534 enslaved blacks.

Manhattan's black workforce was always ethnically diverse, but the pools that supplied it shifted during the course of the 17th and 18th centuries. Members of New Amsterdam's black community were taken from captured Portuguese and Spanish privateers bound for the Caribbean, and from Dutch ships that plied the lanes linking New Netherland to Brazil and West Central Africa (Medford 2004:11-24). After the onset of British rule in 1664, the routing of people from West Central Africa to New York via the Caribbean continued. Direct importation from western Africa also got underway. Profit-seeking city merchants sometimes cast a wide net to fill their shares of the hold. During the

[21] Source: Foote (1991:78) and White (1991:26), except 1703, which is from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1909). The count of black male city residents was recorded incorrectly in a version of the 1703 census (see the tables reproduced in Green and Harrington (1932:95), and the miscount—resulting in a figure of only 630 total blacks for that year—has often made its way into the literature.

1690s, for example, several hundred Africans were brought to New York from Madagascar, an island off the east coast of Africa. Another 117 Malagasy captives reached New York in 1721 (Medford 2004:52-54). As the 18th century advanced, the commercial networks that brokered the slave trade reached deeper into the African interior and spread farther along the coasts. Five key areas in western Africa funneled adults and children into colonial Manhattan's homes, shops, and industrial yards: the Senegambia, Sierra Leone-Liberia, the Gold Coast, the Bight of Benin, and the Niger Delta (Medford 2004:60-73).

The two maps in Figure 2.18 call attention to the discrepancy between the magnitude of the 18th century slave trade and the dearth of European knowledge about African lives. That era's educated Europeans were avid readers and writers of travel accounts, and European publishing houses marketed multi-volume compendia of cultural, historical, and geographical lore from around the globe. Information about Africa collected by Arabic-language geographers also reached European centers of learning during the 18th century, but as historian Philip Curtin (1964:9-27) explains, few principal works were known, and the heyday of Arabic scholarship on Africa had already ended by the time Europeans began trawling for African labor.[22] European merchants, scientists, and missionaries who recorded observations about African societies seldom ventured far from the shorelines and navigable rivers where captives were embarked. The interiors that supplied the trade were relatively unknown.

The Africa that Europeans described had a mix of religions (animism, Christianity, Islam), a range of polities (including hierarchically organized kingdoms), and various methods of reckoning descent. Political and religious offices and authorities were intricately entwined, and mutual aid associations were organized around age, gender, and occupation (see Medford 2004: 35-50, 61-80, 123-138). Africans also had a wide array of understandings about the reciprocities that bound the living and the dead.

Burial logistics and labor

Europeans who visited central and western Africa during the 17th and 18th centuries took note of typical burial places. Journal keepers and letter writers recorded that Africans were laid to rest in cemeteries located on the outskirts of homesteads and settlements, under house floors, and in the churchyards Christian missionaries established in African political and economic metropoles (Medford 2004:48-49, 174-182).

European visitors also took note of how the dead were treated. The treatment of the dead encompasses a range of activities that get underway when a death occurs. These activities—announcing the death, preparing the body for burial, selecting a burial site and digging a grave, transporting the body to the cemetery and conducting graveside rites, marking and visiting the grave—provide the framework for our review of burial logistics and labor. Though the review touches briefly on documentary information from Africa,

[22] On the political twists and turns of the production of knowledge about Africa during the 19th and 20th centuries, see Mudimbe (1988) and Appiah (1992).

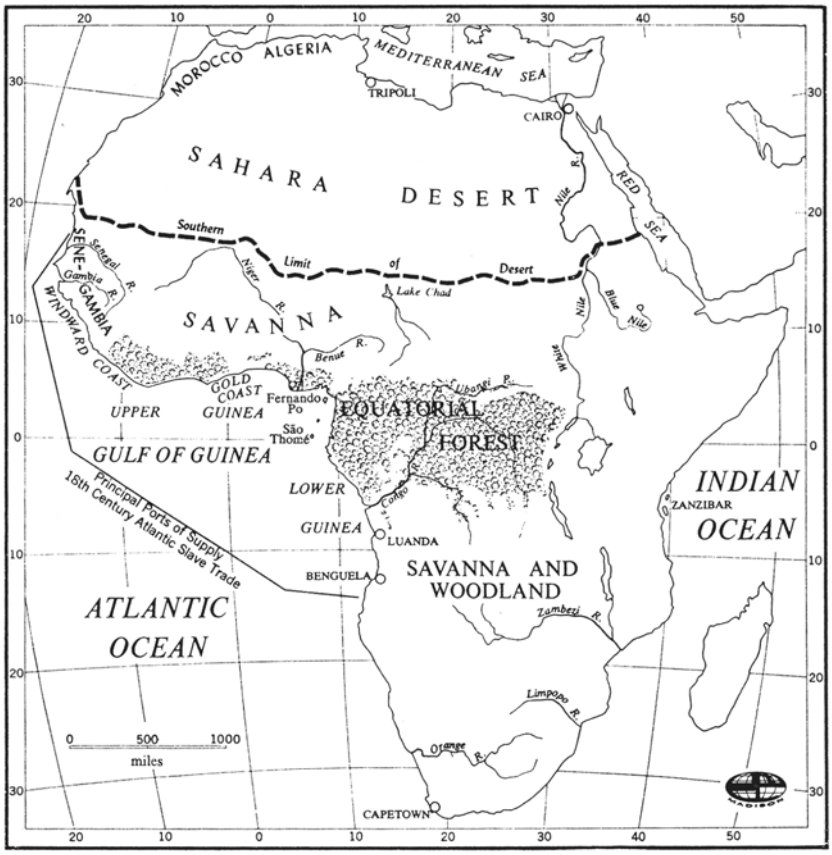
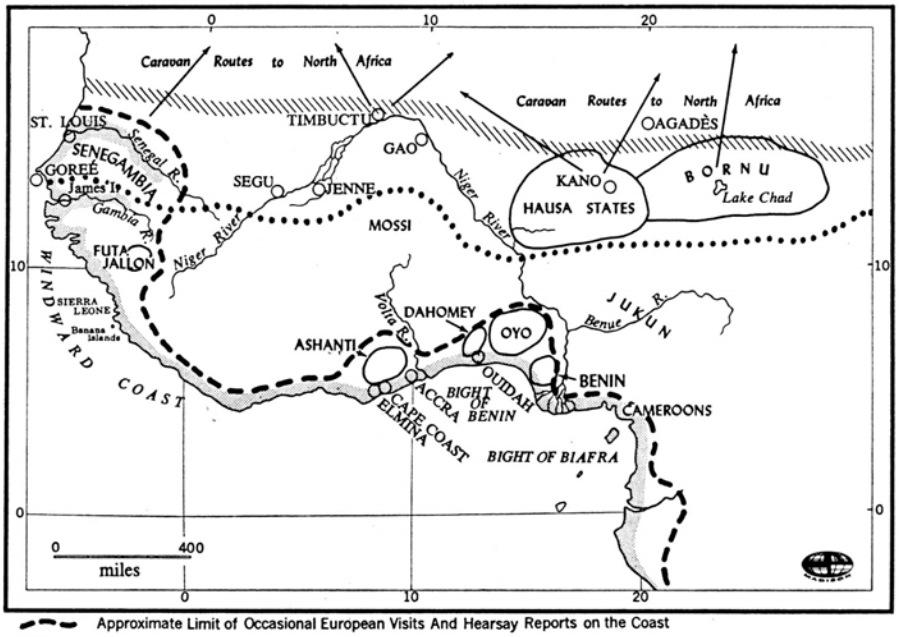


Figure 2.18.
a. Sources of captives from Africa, 18th century (left).

b. Limits of European knowledge of Africa, 18th century (below).

Source: Curtin (1964:7, 21).



the Caribbean, and the antebellum American south, it is mainly concerned with raising questions about the everyday forms of oppression black New Yorkers faced when they laid their relatives and friends to rest. Accoutrements and actions on which the archaeological excavation of the African Burial Ground sheds light are identified in boldface type. These include burial attire (in the form of winding sheets, shrouds, and street clothes), personal adornment and other possessions, coffins, grave digging, the placing of goods in the coffin and on the surface of the grave, and grave markers.

Announcing the death

How news of a death traveled in black New York during the 17th and 18th centuries is not known, but chances are good that it would have spread quickly without the aid of the licensed funeral inviters that many white New Yorkers employed.[23] Manhattan was geographically compact when the African Burial Ground was in use, as the maps reproduced in the first half of the chapter attest. Although Africans were residentially dispersed rather than clustered in a handful of neighborhoods or homes, the city was only a mile wide by a mile and a half long. Enslaved men, women, and children traipsed through its streets and alleys, and greeted one another at its markets and wells. Men gathered in the morning at the foot of Wall Street to be hired out for the day. Men and women visited their families and friends on Sundays, and drank and danced at night in private homes (Medford 2004:138-152). The expanding network of neighborhood chapels mapped by archaeologist Nan Rothschild (1990:43-56) eventually became a conduit for funeral news: the number of Africans attracted to Christian services and catechumen classes increased as the 18th century advanced.

Preparing the body for burial

Washing and laying out the dead was women's work in many colonial American communities. In rural areas, women, singly or in groups, performed these services as a mark of respect for the deceased, the family, and the community. Often these women were midwives as well. This arrangement endured for varying lengths of time—African American women prepared the body for burial well into the 20th century in some pockets of rural America (Rundblad 1995; Roediger 1981:169). In urban centers like New York, African women probably also would have washed and laid out their community's dead when the burial ground was in use.

African men's participation in preparing the body for burial did not enter the 17th and 18th century documentary record. Given that Islam was probably a part of the religious

[23] Funeral inviters went door-to-door to notify mourners about when and where to pay their respects. During the 17th century, funeral inviters performed their duties under the watchful eyes of the Reformed Dutch Church as well as the town—inviters were instructed to comport themselves in a civil manner (Minutes of the Burgomasters, March 4, 1661, in Fernow 1907:80-81); obtain and renew annually a license (April 18, 1691, MCC 1675-1776(1):217); and attend to the funerals of the poor without charge (April 22, 1691, MCC 1675-1776(1):221). During the first half of the 18th century, inviters were authorized to charge 8s. for announcing the death of a child, 12s. for a person between the ages of twelve and twenty, and 18s. for an adult (MCC 1675-1776(4):101).

repertoire of 18th century black New York (see Medford 2004:114), it is likely that washing and laying out the dead was not solely a female domain. In Islamic tradition, men wash and cover men, and women wash and cover women.[24]

Generation as well as gender might also have been a consideration for black New Yorkers who prepared the bodies of friends and relatives visited by death. Two examples illustrate how these fundamental organizing principles can be entwined when preparing the body for the grave. Among the Kuranko of Sierra Leone, where Islamic and traditional practices overlap, a male friend, a son, or a senior wife past her childbearing years attends to a dying man. After death, the man's male friends, assisted by his granddaughters, wash his corpse in fresh water and daub it with oil (Jackson 1989:69). The Muslim dead in the Sakalava area of Madagascar are washed and covered by close male or female kin, "with the exception of parents whose grief is too great" (Feeley-Harnik 1991:33).

Many of the individuals interred at the African Burial Ground would have had family and friends who could discuss and perhaps help furnish appropriate burial attire, be it a **winding sheet, a shroud, or street clothes**.[25] Yet surely some of the graves held people whose preferences were unknown because their stay in the city had been too brief to make deep social ties.

Europeans noted that in Africa the dead were wrapped in cloth. Accounts from the 1700s refer to cloth-wrapped corpses among the Wolof of the Senegambia region, and among a range of coastal and inland peoples in the geographical precursors of modern-day Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Nigeria, Benin, Angola, and the Congo (Medford 2004:175-179). For those who followed the teachings of Islam, the prescribed wrapper would likely have been made from unstitched white cloth (Barratt 2005:181). Sugar cane planters in Barbados did not mention whether their African workers were cloth-wrapped or clad in everyday clothing when interred (Handler and Lange 1978:185). White winding sheets, sometimes supplied by women like Fanny Kemble, were used in parts of the antebellum American south. Kemble had been importuned "for a sufficient quantity of cotton cloth to make a winding-sheet" for a neighbor (Foster 1997:196; Roediger 1981:169).

Did **personal adornment and other possessions** remain with the deceased or were they removed when the body was washed and covered? According to a late 18th century account of burials in Jamaica, the African dead were arrayed with their jewelry—"all the trinkets of the defunct are exposed in the coffin" (cited in Brathwaite 1981:9). The deceased were interred in their jewelry and clothing in parts of the Gold Coast (Medford 2004:176). Probate records for 17th and 18th century white New Yorkers indicate that

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[24] For a discussion of Islam among Africans in colonial America, see Gomez (1998:59-87).

[25] Winding sheets and shrouds were integral to English and Dutch burials during the period when the burial ground was in use. These two coverings are not always differentiated in documents of the day. A length of fabric wound around the body and fastened with pins or hand-tied knots was sometimes called a winding sheet and sometimes called a shroud. A shroud also referred to a particular type of ensemble that might include a loose-fitting, long-tailed shirt or chemise, a cap, and "a small piece of cloth to cover the face" (Barratt 2005:180-181; Earle 1896:305).

jewelry was typically bequeathed to descendants and heirs rather than placed with the dead.

Was the use of **coffins** widespread in black New York? As with the preparation of the body, decisions about a coffin would have mobilized the deceased's kin, friends, and neighbors, either to ensure that a slaveholder provided what was "customary" or to help raise cash for accouterments Africans considered proper and correct.[26] Joshua Delaplaine was one of many artisans a coffin-seeker could call upon. Black cabinetmakers like William Miller might have been approached for coffins—Miller is known in the annals of the African independent church movement for having opened his Cross Street home in 1795 for planning meetings of black Methodists who broke away from the John Street Methodist Church (see Walls 1974). Enslaved Africans also might have made coffins. Carpentry and coopering were two of the trades in which New York's black workers were clustered (Foote 1991:41-44; Medford 2004:103-121). Boards cut from cedar and pine could be had from lumber yards like the one Thomas Shreve, a carpenter and joiner, kept near William Walton's warehouse on Hunter's Key (*New-York Gazette or the Weekly Post-Boy*, June 3, 1754).[27]

Coffin burials for Africans in Barbados and the French West Indies entered the documentary record at the end of the 18th century, by way of plantation work logs and eyewitness descriptions (Handler and Lange 1978:191; Delpuech 2001). Reports and recollections about coffin burials of Africans in the American south also date from the end of the 18th century (Roediger 1981:169). A coffin carried through the streets of New Orleans in the late 1700s had six white ribbons attached to its lid; the end of each ribbon was held by a girl dressed in white (Foster 1997:196). European travel accounts place coffin use in western Africa in the early 1700s, decades before Delaplaine's daybook was filled in. The accounts suggest that coffin burials were becoming common in parts of the Gold Coast and in the city-states of the Niger Delta during the 18th century. In the Loango region of central Africa, 18th century reports indicate that coffins were made from woven thatch or grass (Medford 2004:176-178). Coffin burial appears to have become typical in England and the Netherlands by the end of the 17th century, and perhaps in colonial Manhattan as well (Gittings 1984; Litten 1991; Earle 1896:297; Talman 1968:13; Singleton 1909:253-55).

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[26] Official voices entered the decision-making process when death pushed Africans in the direction of men like city coroner John Burnet. At an inquest Burnet attended on March 20, 1758, the jurors were unable to discover the identity of the African whose case they heard; among the man's possessions were seven Spanish dollars, a pair of silver cuff links, a silver ring, a pair of wrought metal buttons, and an old key (Case no. 60, Burnet 1748-58 [2004:82]). Whether the man was buried in a coffin did not enter the record, but municipal arrangements for burying strangers would have come into play. When black residents of the almshouse died, the wardens apparently were responsible for providing a coffin, as suggested by Joshua Delaplaine's daybook (see Chapter 10).

[27] Newspaper advertisements placed by New York City artisans are used throughout this report. Unless otherwise noted, such advertisements are from Gottesman (1938).

Selecting a gravesite and digging the grave: New York's African sextons

Did each funeral party select its own gravesite and supply its own gravedigger? Or did a handful of men routinely undertake these tasks, thereby serving as de facto caretakers of some, perhaps all, portions of the African Burial Ground?

In New Amsterdam/New York's public cemeteries and private churchyards, **grave digging** was centralized rather than ad hoc: gravediggers, acting under the auspices of city officials and congregational governing boards, charged a standardized fee for clearing the surface and breaking the ground. In 1703 when the city granted Trinity's Vestrymen the right to operate the town cemetery situated on the north side of the church, the Common Council set the fee schedule at 1s. for the grave of a child under age twelve, and 3s. for the grave of a person age twelve and over (Stokes 1915-28(4):443).

Churchyard gravediggers sometimes doubled as sextons (church officials in charge of property), a role that conferred community and congregational esteem. In addition to breaking the ground, sextons typically oversaw the ringing of the death bell and the rental of funeral equipment such as palls and boards. Sextons also helped organize funeral processions and sometimes officiated at the grave.[28] The centrality of the gravedigger-sexton to the material and spiritual sides of interment figured in New York's municipal code. Gravediggers, as mentioned in the chronology entry for 1731, were excluded from the headcount when the Common Council capped the size of African funerals at twelve.

The names of Manhattan's black gravedigger-sextons did not enter the documentary record until the years immediately after the American Revolution, a period when the city's churches were slow to groom black leaders (Hodges 1999:180-183) and to make provisions for the burial of black communicants. Five African-American gravedigger-sextons who mobilized resources to ensure the safety and dignity of their community's dead might have dug graves or officiated at interments at the African Burial Ground during the 1780s and 1790s. Among them are Scipio and Virgil Gray (they may have been brothers, or father and son), who resided at 47 Beekman Street, near the intersection of Beekman and Gold adjacent to Anglican St. George's Chapel. It is likely that Scipio Gray was a gravedigger for the congregation, and that the lot he made available for African interments during the height of the grave-robbing scandal was part of St. George's yard (see the chronology entry for 1788). Virgil Gray was listed as St. George's under-Sexton in the 1794 city directory.

African Society member Lewis Francis—his name appears at the end of the list on the petition reproduced in Figure 2.16—was the first known gravedigger at the new African cemetery on Chrystie Street (see the chronology entry for 1795). The Chrystie Street cemetery, which became the final resting place for black city residents immediately after the African Burial Ground had closed, was eventually ceded to St. Philips Church,

[28] In Manhattan's 17th century Dutch community, the funeral inviter (*aanspreeker*) typically took on these tasks (Talman 1968).

Manhattan's first black Anglican congregation. Francis served as one of St. Philips' churchwardens (St. Philips Church 1986:18, 90).

Peter Williams, Sr., who in 1795 helped lead the formation of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Zion Church, was a gravedigger for the John Street Methodist Church. Williams used the fees he earned from grave digging to buy his own and his family's way out of bondage from the John Street congregation, which had purchased Williams in 1783 (John Street Methodist Church, Accounts 1783-1795). When the A.M.E. Zion Church erected a permanent meetinghouse in 1801 at Church and Leonard Streets, it provided burial vaults for its members. Samuel Day, a sexton at Mother Zion, as the church was known, helped oversee the vaults, which were rapidly filled. Between 1801 and 1807, there were some 150 interments annually there (Duffy 1968:219; for information on Samuel Day, see New York Death Libers, Vol. 1).

Direct linkages between the African Burial Ground, the African Society, and the African independent church movement are likely, but it should be kept in mind that securing burial space would have been a key concern long before the names of black church leaders and community activists entered the documentary record. It should also be kept in mind that a "commitment to the dead" (Wilf 1989:512) was not unique to black New York. African Americans in Philadelphia, Newport, Charleston, and Richmond also established benevolent associations and independent churches with the explicit goal of providing their communities a proper place for burial (see Nash 1988; Wilder 2001; Kuyk 1983).

Transporting the body to the cemetery and conducting graveside rites

Given the location of the African Burial Ground, some form of procession was probably customary from early on. Did members of the procession congregate at the house where the deceased had lived? How large was a typical funeral party? Recall that the 1731 amendment to the ordinance governing black funerals set a quota for the attendees but excluded the bearers from the count. Did the number of bearers increase after 1731 to exploit the loophole in the law? Was the body transported to the cemetery in a handbarrow or a horse-drawn cart, or did the bearers shoulder the coffin on a bier or a board through the city streets and, circa 1745-1760, one of the palisade gates? Did the cortege proceed to the African Burial Ground in silence, or with prayers, shouts, dancing, and song? In Boston in 1723 a black funeral "zig-zagged across town and into the night," an "adaptation of meandering funeral corteges common in West Africa" (Desrochers 2002:648). African funeral processions in the late 18th century Caribbean and in the antebellum south were large, song filled, and slow moving (Handler and Lange 1978:186-191; Roediger 1981:170). In Jamaica, bearers raised and lowered the coffin. In Antigua, they danced a reel (Medford 2004:180).

Oppression affected the scheduling as well as the size of African funerals. Night funerals were common in both the colonial and the antebellum eras: after toiling for others from sunup to sundown, Africans used the night as their own (see Roediger 1981). Night funerals would have provided opportunities for geographically distant kin and friends to

attend the graveside rites. Prior to the banning of night funerals in New York in 1722, black city residents may well have buried their dead at dusk or after dark. Whether sundown became a typical time for holding black funerals after 1722 is unclear.

Did the mourners place any **goods in the coffin or on the surface of the grave**, such as food and drink, utensils and crockery, or flowers and herbs? Expensive mats decorated the surface of 18th century graves in parts of Sierra Leone-Liberia. Objects reminiscent of a person's life were placed atop graves in Gold Coast locales; mourners returned to the grave to care for the objects. Offerings of food and drink, and personal belongings such as tobacco and pipes, were placed on graves in some Niger Delta regions (Medford 2004:176-77). Direct historical evidence for grave offerings exists for Jamaica. During the late 1680s, enslaved Africans in Jamaica supplied the corpse with "bread, roasted fowles, sugar, rum, tobacco, & pipes" (Handler and Lange 1978:199). An African-American folk belief prevalent in parts of antebellum rural Georgia held that "the last objects touched by the deceased" should be placed on his grave lest his spirit retrieve them from his house. A variant of the belief was recorded in 1980 among the Kongo of Central Africa (Thompson 1983:134).

Marking and visiting the grave

Were **grave markers** used to memorialize the dead? Simple stone slabs like the ones at Trinity Churchyard (see Figure 2.3) were common in 18th century Christian cemeteries in rural and urban America, but whether headstones were typically provided for churchyard burials of blacks is not known. In 1798 in Barbados, the manager at Newton Plantation requested a small stone marker for the grave of one of the plantation's "much-valued slaves" who had been interred in an Anglican churchyard. Such requests were rare (Handler and Lange 1978:203, 175-78).

Did the deceased's family and friends return to the cemetery to visit the grave, either on their own time, or by absconding from work? Were post-interment rites conducted?

In Jamaica during the last half of the 18th century, Europeans noted that Africans heaped dirt on the month-old graves of their dead. Known as "covering" the grave, the practice was one of many post-interment rituals that involved returning to the cemetery to care for the grave and the spirit of its occupant (Handler and Lange 1978:203-204). Philip Madin's 1779 account of his journey through the West Indies calls attention to the consequences of neglecting post-interment rites. Madin learned from a Barbados planter that the departed husband of an African woman had troubled her dreams because a graveside ritual had been delayed (cited in Handler and Lange 1978:205). Large, noisy Sunday gatherings in Philadelphia's African cemetery were cause for complaint during the 18th century (Nash 1988:13-14). Barbados-born Africans were said in 1789 to be "superstitiously attached to the burial places of their ancestors and friends" (Handler and Lange 1978:209).

In sum, only a fraction of the funeral customs in the black Atlantic world entered the 17th and 18th century documentary record. While there is no doubt that burial practices in

black New York drew on deep and varied African roots, using written documents to identify the epicenters of these practices is a difficult task. Funeral customs in captive-sending areas in the interiors of West Central and West Africa were largely unknown to cultural outsiders.

Archaeologists who study African Diaspora communities have long grappled with uneven documentary records (see Posnansky 1999; Jamieson 1995; and Samford 1996). Yet the archaeology of the African Diaspora is far more than a search for material signs of African ethnic identities. Contemporary archaeologists seek to understand how the experiences of Africans in the Americas differed from the experiences of other newcomers. In the words of archaeologist Theresa Singleton (1999:17): "To ignore the consequences of forced migration, enslavement, legalized discrimination, and racism misses the very essence of how African Americans created their world and responded to that of the dominant culture." If the challenge for archaeology is "to pry open places where the material world can inform the analysis of these complexities," then the New York African Burial Ground is an especially important site. It was the setting for a rite of passage (burial) that connected the desires of the living to the treatment of the dead in America's urban north, where the pervasiveness of slavery during the colonial and early federal periods is only now coming to wide public attention.